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RUSKIN  
THE GREAT VICTORIAN

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM

Introduction to Proust: his Life, his Circle and his Work  
Tolstoy: his Life and Work

NOVELS

Livingstones  
Wilderness  
Green for a Season





JOHN RUSKIN, 1864-65

*From a self-portrait in water colour*

{ frontispiece

DERRICK LEON

# RUSKIN

THE GREAT VICTORIAN

LONDON

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To  
SIR SYDNEY COCKERELL,  
DR. GREVILLE MACDONALD,  
AND MR. CHARLES GOODSPEED,  
without whose sympathy and  
generous help this book could never  
have been written in its present form.



## Publisher's Note

The author of this work died soon after it was completed. Ruskin papers, which he never saw, have come to light since that time. He would not have found it necessary to change the views he expressed here, and they have not changed the validity of his judgement. It seems worthwhile now to reissue the book, a sympathetic and finely written biography, without attempting the pedantry of revision and a new edition.

*January 1969*

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## Preface

THE late Derrick Leon died in November 1944, shortly after completing the first draft of his manuscript, but before being able to carry out his intention of revising his work before passing it through the press. In view of this, it was considered preferable that the material which he had collected with so much labour should be presented in the form in which it had been left, subject to a check of quotations and obvious grammatical errors.

The attempt has been made to discharge this duty as carefully as possible, but in a work of such length and detail, it is inevitable that mistakes may have been made, and possibly in some instances, Derrick Leon's draft misunderstood. The editor requests that, knowing the meticulous accuracy of the author, and the great care with which he would have revised and checked his work, all such errors be attributed not to the author, but to himself.

G. L.  
March, 1948.





## Author's Note

THE author wishes to take this opportunity of thanking the following persons for their generous help in the writing of this book: Mrs. Angeli, for information contained in unpublished letters from Ruskin to her uncle, D. G. Rossetti; Mrs. Detmar Blow, for the loan of her collection of unpublished letters from Ruskin, Rose La Touche, Mrs. La Touche, Joan Agnew, etc., to her aunt, the late Georgiana, Lady Mount Temple; Sir Sydney Cockerell, for the loan of his valuable Ruskin notebook (lent formerly to W. G. Collingwood for the preparation of his *Life of Ruskin* but since much amplified); and for much other Ruskin material; Charles E. Goodspeed of Boston, Mass., for placing at his disposal all the material he had collected for a monograph on the Ruskin marriage, and for other Ruskiniana of great interest; Mrs. Michael Joseph, for the loan of unpublished letters from Ruskin and from Millais to her father, W. Holman Hunt; Mrs. Geoffrey Keynes, for the loan of a letter from Ruskin to her uncle, R. B. Litchfield; Miss Susan Lushington, for the loan of letters from Ruskin to her father, Judge Lushington; Dr. Greville MacDonald, for the gift of his large collection of letters from Ruskin, Rose La Touche, Mrs. La Touche, Joan Agnew, Lady Mount Temple, etc., to his father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. George MacDonald; Miss Clara Schweizer, for the loan of letters from Ruskin to her friend Mrs. Kevill Davies (née Lily Armstrong) and the Hon. Clare Stuart Wortley and Sir Ralph Millais for information based upon family papers in their possession.

He also wishes to thank the Ruskin Literary Trustees for their courtesy in permitting him to reprint so many passages from Ruskin's letters, many of them published here for the first time; the Officials and Librarians of Yale University Library for permission to publish passages from Ruskin letters in their possession; the many others who have given permission for the inclusion of copyright passages, and his publishers for their unfailing sympathy and advice upon the many unexpected problems which arose during the preparation of the book.

Thanks are also due to the following for their permission to include quotations from various volumes which have been referred to in the compilation of this book:

Messrs. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. (*The Collected Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn; *The Life of Ruskin*, by E. T. Cook; *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism*, by W. M. Rossetti; *Ruskin the Prophet*, by J. H. Whitehouse; *The Life, Letters and Work of*

*Frederick Leighton*, by Mrs. R. Barrington; *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, by Greville MacDonald; *George MacDonald and His Wife*, by the same; *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, by E. S. Maurice; *The Story of Two Noble Lives*, by A. J. C. Hare; *Letters of a Noble Woman*, by M. F. Young).

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Mr. H. L. Holman Hunt and Mrs. Michael Joseph (*Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, by W. Holman Hunt).

Mrs. M. S. Hopwood (*The Life of Octavia Hill*, by C. E. Maurice).

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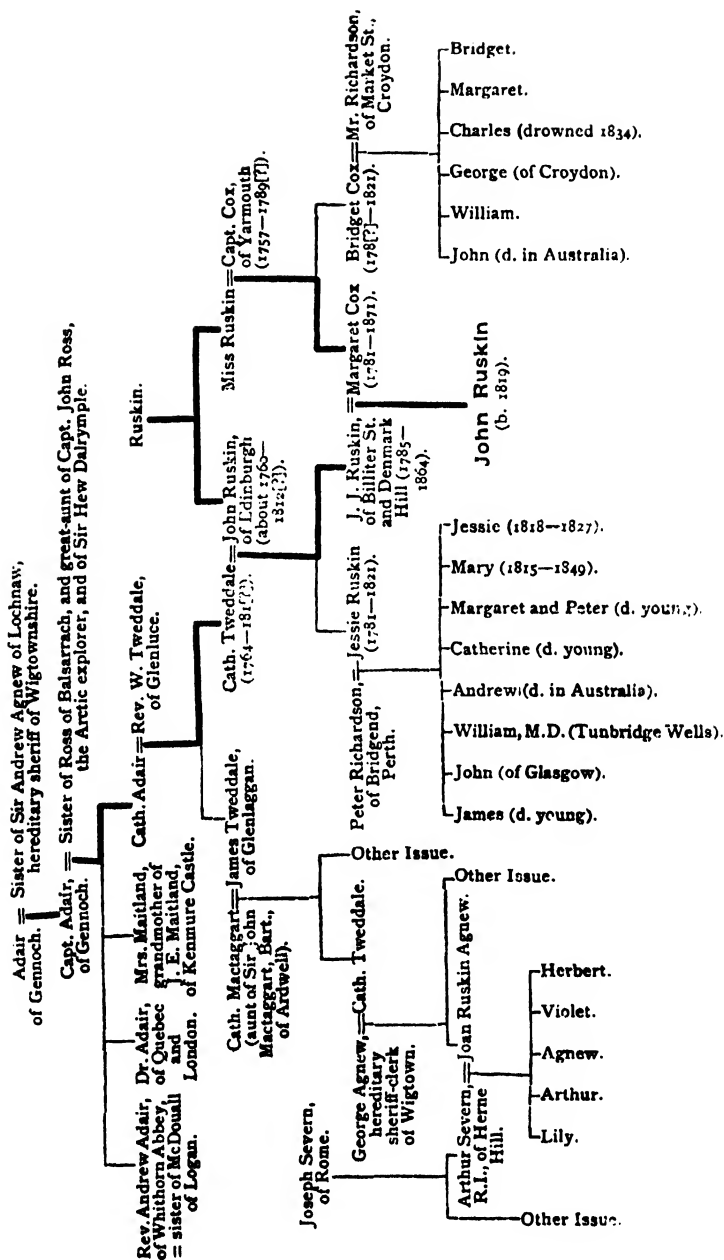
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## Publisher's Note

DERRICK Leon's biography of Ruskin was first published in 1949 and the author died a year later. Ruskin papers which have come to light since then, and been used by other writers, would not have made it necessary for him to change his judgments significantly. The book stands the test of time. It is reissued without apology and without the minor additional footnotes which would be more pedantic than valuable.



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# Book I

## Background for Life 1819-1836

*Youth is properly the forming time—that in which a man makes himself, or is made, what he is for ever to be.*

RUSKIN: *Fors Clavigera*, Letter XXXII.

*Every noble youth looks back, as to the chiefest joy which this world's honour ever gave him, to the moment when first he saw his father's eyes flash with pride, and his mother turn away her head, lest he should take her tears for tears of sorrow.*

RUSKIN: *A Joy for Ever*.

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## Chapter I

1. *The disintegration of tradition: the Two Nations—rich and poor: social conditions in 1830: the need for reform.* 2. *Birth and parentage: grandparents: the founding of Ruskin, Telford and Domecq.* 3. *Hunter Street: Herne Hill: early childhood: the daily Bible reading: domestic life: love for his father.* 4. *The two families of cousins—Croydon and Perth: Jessie: an Ossianic poem on her death: Mary Richardson.*

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I  
A MAN'S life is his time: his time a figure in the great historical procession. And as every period is conditioned by causes which lie in the immediate past; so does the past, like a great tree, throw shade upon each life that flowers after it, when the future, like the life, is but an unborn dream.

The causes that created the great sociological chaos of the nineteenth century lay chiefly in the latter decades of the century before, when scientific invention and rational thought paved the way not only for a new way of life, but for a new attitude towards it. Until the 'seventies or 'eighties, the influence of the old world still persisted. The world of art was governed by unquestioned Rules of Taste: the social structure was based, if a little precariously, upon a vaguely benevolent if belated feudalism. But slowly, almost unperceived, the aristocratic tradition disintegrated. The machine, brave portent of a new millennium, seduced employer and labourer alike. There was a slow, significant movement in population from country to town;

a slow growth of urbanism, hideous, but at first concealed. There was the spectacular rise of a new and powerful class—rich manufacturers bloated with the huge profits, the fruits of the new industrial era, without social conscience and without tradition.

For fifty years a slow, subterranean fermentation went on, apparently progressive; apparently innocuous. The manufacturing districts became pitted with factories and mines. New towns sprang up, with hideous insanitary hovels for the factory workers on the one hand; and splendid suburban villas for the owners of the factories on the other. Wealth advanced hand in hand with poverty: and steadily the power of the Church declined.

By 1830, it had become evident to men less perspicacious than the young Disraeli, that England was now become Two Nations. A Nation of the Rich. A Nation of the Poor.

Charles Greville, that aristocratic, genial, shrewd and impartial observer, continually voiced in his diary the general social unease. "I am convinced that very few years will elapse before the Church will really be in danger," he noted in 1829. "People will grow so tired of paying so dearly for so bad an article." The Catholicism of Europe, when he travelled, seemed to him "far more accordant with the spirit and essence of religion than to have the churches as ours are, opened like theatres at stated hours and days for the performance of a long service, at the end of which the audience is turned out and the doors are locked till the next representation".<sup>1</sup>

The great houses of England continued to entertain with princely splendour. At Chatsworth, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire, it was customary during parties for forty guests to sit down to dinner every day, with about a hundred and fifty servants in the steward's room and servants' hall. At Belvoir Castle, the seat of the Duke of Rutland, the guests were aroused by the strains of the band of His Grace's regiment, which marched round the terrace to enliven the party before it went off to hunt or shoot.

Nevertheless, country gentlemen assembling to amuse themselves at Panshanger or Broadlands, at Chatsworth or Bocket, began to talk of failing rents and general distress among the poor. They murmured that things, if not checked, could only become worse; cogitated upon what measures could be taken to avert the prospect of general ruin.

Other gentlemen such as Michael Sadler and Lord Ashley, who, astonishingly, seemed to care for the welfare of others no less than their own, were busy bringing to the notice of the Government some highly significant and unpalatable facts. Spinners at the age of seven worked in worsted factories from five in the morning until eight at night with only one break of thirty minutes at noon, under overseers who strapped them when they grew tired. Young girls in mills, at the busy season, slaved from three in the morning until ten at night,

<sup>1</sup> *The Greville Memoirs*, Ed. H. Reeve, 6.3.1829, vol. 1, p. 191.

and arrived home so exhausted that they fell asleep with their poor food unchewed in their mouths. In the pits, children were employed as young as three years old. Even babies were sometimes taken down to keep rats from their fathers' food. Tiny children were in charge of the ventilating doors, and hour after hour they sat alone, in intense darkness, with only the occasional passing or repassing of a coal carriage to relieve their dreadful fears. Children crawled in damp passages, drawing carriages like dogs harnessed to a go-cart, and moving on all fours. Children stood ankle deep in water for hours, pumping water.

In the foully crowded slums of the cities, where the hovels were built backing on to some noisome stream that served alike as sewer and well, apprentices toiled for nineteen hours a day, with scarcely rags to cover them, and barely food enough to keep them living. They were allowed not the slightest relaxation, and were forbidden to go to church on Sundays.

And everywhere, in squalid courts, in crowded factories, there was to be heard the one hopeful whisper: Reform. Reform. Reform. By 1830, many thought that revolution was inevitable, but hoped that wise constitutional methods might mitigate its worst effects. There was unrest even on the farms. The Duke of Richmond was summoned to his estates in Sussex, and, leading fifty of his own farmers and tenants, routed a mob of two hundred labourers who threatened arson.

In the following year, there were riots over the Reform Bill at Bristol, which, observed Greville, "for brutal ferocity and wanton, unprovoked violence may vie with some of the worst scenes of the French Revolution. . . . Nothing could exceed the ferocity of the populace, the imbecility of the magistracy, or the good conduct of the troops. More punishment was inflicted by them than has generally been known, and some hundreds were killed or wounded by the sabre. One body of dragoons pursued a rabble of colliers into the country, and covered the fields and roads with the bodies of wounded wretches, making a severe example of them".<sup>1</sup>

Closely following upon the riots came epidemics of cholera. "The reports from Sunderland," Greville noted, "exhibit a state of human misery, and necessarily of moral degradation, such as I hardly ever heard of, and it is no wonder, when a great part of the community is plunged into such a condition (and we may fairly suppose that there is a gradually mounting scale, with every degree of wretchedness up to the wealth and splendour which glitter on the surface of society) that there should be so many who are ripe for any desperate scheme of revolution."<sup>2</sup> When the plague broke out in London, his reflections at the revelations of horror were even more sombre. "A more lament-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 11.11.1831, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 14.11.1831, p. 302.



able exhibition of human misery than that given by the medical men who called at the Council Office yesterday I never heard. They are in the most abject state of poverty, without beds to lie upon. The men live by casual labour, are employed by the hour, and often get no more than four or five hours' employment in the course of the week. They are huddled and crowded together by families in the same room, not as permanent lodgers, but procuring a temporary shelter; in short, in the most abject state of physical privation and moral degradation that can be imagined. . . .<sup>1</sup>

"A man came from Bethnal Green. They are all weavers, forming a sort of separate community; there they are born, there they live and labour, and there they die. They neither migrate nor change their occupation; they can do nothing else. They have increased in a ratio at variance with any principle of population, having nearly tripled in twenty years, from twenty-two thousand to sixty-two thousand. They are for the most part out of employment, and can get none; eleven hundred are crammed into the poor-house, five or six in a bed; six thousand receive parochial relief. The parish is in debt; every day adds to the number of paupers and diminishes that of ratepayers. . . .

"The awful thing is the vast extent of misery and distress which prevails, and the evidence of the rotten foundation on which the whole fabric of this gorgeous society rests, for I call that rotten which exhibits thousands upon thousands of human beings reduced to the lowest stage of moral and physical degradation, with no more of the necessaries of life than serve to keep body and soul together, and whole classes of artisans without means of subsistence. However complicated and remote the causes of this state of things, the manifestations present themselves in a frightful presence and reality, and those whose ingenuity, and experience, and philosophical views may enable them accurately to point out the causes and the gradual increase of this distress are totally unable to suggest a remedy or foresee an end to it. Can such a state of things permanently go on? Can any reform ameliorate it? Is it possible for any country to be considered in a healthy condition when there is no such thing as a *general* diffusion of the comforts of life (varying of course with every variety of circumstance which can affect the prosperity of individuals and classes), but when the extremes prevail of the most unbounded luxury and enjoyment and the most dreadful privation and suffering?"<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Society continued not only to exist, but to contrive the most extravagant dissipations. Towards 1836, such was its lust for amusement that parties enlivened with "dinners, tents, illuminations and dancing" began in the morning and went on far into the night. Only a cloud gathered the following year, at the possibility of

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 14.2.1832, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 17.2.1832, pp. 303-5.

King William's end. "The Tories", Greville observed on 16 June, 1837, "are in great consternation at the King's approaching death, from the advantage which they foresee their opponents must derive from it as far as the extension of their power is concerned, and they prognosticate, according to their custom, all sorts of dismal consequences, none of which, of course, will come to pass. *Nothing* will happen, because, in this country, *nothing* ever does."<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Life is a circle, and in *Praeterita*, his last great work written during old age, when all his thoughts were turned to joining "his father and his mother and his old nurse in the land o' the leal",<sup>2</sup> Ruskin wrote the story of his own early years, that passed in an isolation as complete as the young Buddha's from all knowledge of the chaos and suffering outside his household's gates. *Praeterita* is a work of great idiosyncrasy and charm. It has all the exquisite tenderness and candour of Marmontel, the delicate artistry, the lucid insight, and the good-humoured, pungent irony of Proust. But it can scarcely be taken as a complete record of the passion of his youth or the ardent forays of his mature manhood. It is the memory of a distant past recollected in tranquillity between periods of pathological mental stress. It is not a completed picture. Much has been omitted intentionally, because it was written at a time when the author dared dwell only upon pleasant things. Still more has been omitted unintentionally, because his memory had become defective, and the ardour that inspired his youth grown faint. Thus it has impressed upon many readers a picture that is but one aspect of a complete truth.

Ruskin was born at 54 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, in an unassuming yellow brick Georgian house, in a row, on 8 February, 1819: the same year that saw the birth of Queen Victoria, Walt Whitman, Charles Kingsley and James Russell Lowell; and the publication of Rogers' *Human Life* and of *Don Juan*. His mother and his father were both of the lower middle class, though there were forbears of a certain social eminence. Of the origin of the name, much has been speculated. But little is known. All that can be said with certainty is that a John Ruskin appeared in Edinburgh in the earlier half of the eighteenth century, whose son was John Ruskin's paternal grandfather and whose daughter was his maternal grandmother. The brother and sister had married into different spheres; the daughter's husband being a Captain Cox of Yarmouth, employed in the herring fisheries, and the son's wife a Catherine Tweddale, whose father was the Minister of Glenluce, and had in his possession the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 16.6.1837, vol. 3, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 27.3.1881; Ruskin's *Works*, Ed. Cook and Wedderburn, vol. 37, p. 348. (All references to *Works* refer to this edition, unless otherwise stated.)

National Covenant of the Scottish covenanters, given him by an aunt who received it from the Bailie of Farniswood who was executed, because it was thought to be in his keeping. This Rev. W. Tweddale had married a Catherine Adair, and it is through her (his great-grandmother) that Ruskin claims kinship with the Adairs of Gennoch and Rosses of Balsarrach, both families of distinguished connections and ample fortune. But of such alliances Ruskin himself knew little or nothing, his own acquaintance being limited to his two aunts and their families, both of whom had married men called Richardson—one (his father's sister Jessie) a tanner of Perth; and the other (his mother's sister Bridget) a baker of Market Street, Croydon.

Catherine Tweddale, Ruskin's grandmother, had fallen in love with the handsome John Ruskin, a wine merchant in Edinburgh,—a man, as his son wrote of him later, "more magnificent in his expenditure than mindful of his family, so indiscriminate and boundless in his hospitalities that, when the invited guests arrived, he would sometimes have to inquire their names"—and run away to marry him before she was turned sixteen. So joyous was her disposition that, even after the birth of her first child, a visitor coming upon her one day unannounced found her vigorously dancing a threesome reel with only chairs as partners. Her reckless, improvident husband was, nevertheless, a man of intellectual tastes, and among his friends was the famous Dr. Thomas Brown who frequently visited their house in the Old Town.

Their second child, John James (Ruskin's father) was born on 10 May, 1775. He was educated at the Edinburgh High School under the famous doctor Adam and, early displaying a precocious taste for literature and art, attended eagerly any lectures that might advance his interests. Handsome, intelligent and gay, he also took part in the amateur theatricals which were given before the social élite of the town. But before he was sixteen, his sister Jessie had married her tanner, and his cousin, Margaret Cox, was invited to live with the Edinburgh family in her place.

Margaret accepted this rise in the social scale with a becoming gratitude. Her father of the herring fleet—a man who made himself very agreeable during his rare appearances at home, indulged his daughters affectionately, but whipped them with new brown twigs when they told lies—had died in an accident many years before, and since then her mother had supported both herself and her two daughters by keeping a public-house at Croydon. The girls had nevertheless been given the best education that Croydon could offer to young ladies; and though it is highly unlikely that this was much to boast of, Margaret had risen to the heights of becoming the head pupil of her school, and was at least practical and intelligent. A tall, conventional, not unhandsome girl, with a passionate nature rigidly controlled by a formidable evangelical puritanism, she looked upon



I. THE PARENTS OF JOHN RUSKIN  
*From Portraits by James Northcote, R.A.*





II. JOHN RUSKIN

Aged 3½ years

*By James Northcote, R.A.*

her cousin, a dark-eyed, eager youth four years younger than herself, as immeasurably her superior, and tempered her elder-sisterly counsels with an admiration that could not fail to be touching.

It seems that Margaret's presence in the Edinburgh household soon became a matter of necessity. Old John Ruskin—a man who, as his wife had it, “seldom knew his own mind for two hours together”—was fast failing both in the wine trade and in his wits: the young girl he had run off with was breaking beneath the strain, and her niece became the quiet ruler of the household.

When he left school in 1807, such was the chaos in the family fortunes that John James Ruskin decided to go to London to learn the wine trade, in order that he might ultimately take control of his father's business. Anxiously, he pondered whether all the devotion he had given to the things of the mind would not be wasted in the commercial world in which he saw the only hope of advancement; but Dr. Thomas Brown reassured him, even advising him earnestly by letter to study Latin and political economy. On the night he went away, Margaret Cox, who had tacitly pledged herself to wait until he could claim her as his wife, threw herself upon the floor of her bedroom and passed the night without moving in a passion of grief and tears.

She waited for him nine years: nine years during which old Mr. Ruskin's business disintegrated completely, until he died by his own hand; nine years which transformed the youthful piety and practical ability of a girl into a grim and narrow rectitude and an implacable domination of a woman; nine years in which she deliberately trained herself in mind and spirit to be the wife of the young man she considered an immeasurably superior being to herself.

During those nine years, while, under the influence of Dr. Brown, Margaret Cox was reading all the “right” books and assiduously cultivating the tastes of polite society which had been unknown to her as a daughter of the proprietor of the King's Head at Croydon, John James Ruskin, away in London, was fast getting on in the world. His first job was a clerkship in a firm of vintners, George, Murphy and Co., where he met a young Spaniard called Domecq who owned fine vineyards at Macharnudo, and had also come to London in order to learn the retail end of the trade. Two years later, in 1809, the year of Corunna, with Wellesley and Soult marching and counter-marching in the peninsula, this young Spaniard decided to open his own business in London; and such was his good opinion of Ruskin's abilities, that he offered to make him his manager and partner forthwith. A third man, Henry Telford, a country gentleman with a melancholy romantic countenance, plenty of money, and perfect manners, was found to provide some capital, and the three of them took sober offices in Billiter Street, and adorned the door with a brass plate bearing the names Ruskin, Telford and Domecq.

The business prospered rapidly. Domecq's sherry from the vineyards of Macharnudo was of excellent quality; Telford supplied adequate capital and otherwise "slept" most gracefully; and John James Ruskin, handsome, energetic, and determined to rise, himself sold the sherry up and down the country with perseverance, tact and a formidable power of persuasion.

Not that it was very difficult. The sherry was of rare quality, and those were the days when the new and aspiring middle class entertained at dinners which "they put themselves in an agony to give, and generally their guests in as great an agony to partake of". They were also days when it was not unseemly for young gentlemen to drink themselves under the table several nights a week. The sherry almost sold itself.

Nevertheless, for John James Ruskin life was not at first a steady triumphal procession of success. A very few years after the new firm was established, there had been a grave family scandal. Through grief over his wife, who had fallen dead during the christening of a child of her daughter Jessie, John Ruskin had one day soon afterwards, at Bowerswell in Perth, ended his own life by cutting his throat; leaving behind him a formidable array of debts, which the shrewd, sensitive, proud and "entirely honest" John James determined to shoulder and to liquidate. He went back to Edinburgh, established a definite understanding with the faithful and practical Margaret, and then returned once more to London to devote himself even more assiduously to selling the sherry from the admirable vineyards of Macharnudo. It was a life of agreeable business dealings, easy, rootless contacts, and intellectual pleasures. He still sketched, and looked at pictures when the opportunity presented itself: he still read with eager avidity the "best" books of the day. And as he travelled in Scotland or Spain, devoting the best of himself to the expert salesmanship of sherry, there were doubtless moments when the beauty of a castle or a sunset aroused in him a wistful disappointment that he was unable in any way adequately to express his admiration.

Presently, when the new company had paid sufficient dividends for him to disembarass himself of his father's debts, put by a modest competence, and prepare a fitting residence for his future wife, he returned to Bowerswell to contract his marriage in much the same mood of shrewd and kindly efficiency as he would have concluded a gratifying business deal.

For some reason which has never been divulged, Margaret Cox hesitated. Perhaps it was because she could not forget his disapproval of cousin marriages. Nevertheless the forthright John James summoned a minister, married her out of hand, and so quietly that even the servants in the house had no knowledge of the event; and carried her off without delay to Hunter Street. Though Ruskin often heard

the story later, he never had the curiosity to discover the reason for his mother's reluctance or his father's haste.

## 3

54 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, a neighbourhood eminently suitable for the home of a modestly prosperous and wholly respectable vintner, was not a particularly romantic spot to be born in. But fortunately it commanded a unique view of a "marvellous iron post, out of which the water-carts were filled through beautiful little trap-doors, by pipes like boa-constrictors";<sup>1</sup> and in a few years, long after he had tired of watching these intricate transactions, and noted to himself, when his mother sang him "Hush-a-bye baby", that "rock" was a singularly infelicitous rhyme to "top", the little household removed itself to a suburban house in the newly fashionable quarter of Herne Hill.

Herne Hill, four miles south of the "Standard in Cornhill", was in those days a place of tranquil slopes and spacious country views. The Ruskins' house was the northernmost one of a group of four semi-detached and flat-faced three-storeyed villas, agreeably placed on the crown of the slope about a hundred and fifty feet above sea level. From the garret windows, on fine days, you could see right across the Thames valley to Windsor and Harrow on one side, and on the other to the wooded Norwood Hills; and it had a pleasant garden, both back and front, richly planted with shrubberies and blossoming trees. There was also a miniature orchard, arranged by the previous owner with tender care, which comprised apple trees and pear trees, a tall whiteheart cherry, a black Kentish one, a mulberry, and well grown hedges of gooseberry and currant. Outside, the small plateau, bounded by the surrounding slopes, formed a greater garden even more delightful. Here, for the next few years, young Ruskin enjoyed a childhood of idyllic charm. It was not paradisaical, because his mother was a martinet who smothered her natural affections beneath a formidable establishment of rasping renunciations and rigid rules. Very soon, under her grim evangelicalism, he found that "what people told him was God's Service was disagreeable, and what people told him was His book, not entertaining". But as much of his time was spent alone, he learned early to taste and recognise the unalloyed joys of clear perception. From as early as he could remember, he was one who loved to stand and stare. Indeed, long before he could stand, he stared upon his knees. Form and colour had for him an irresistible fascination. The patterns in curtain and carpet, and the shapes of stones and clouds and trees, and the symmetry of flowers and insects, the loveliness of a tree's buds against the sky seen from some contorted position discovered by himself—all these aroused in

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, pp. 15-16.



him both wonder and delight. His vision combined the emotional appreciation, the deep sensibility, of the poet and the detached curiosity of the scientist. He pulled flowers to pieces to learn their structure, collected seeds for their variety of forms, and in later years, as he was to write in *The Cestus of Aglaia*, he was quite sure that being forced to make all he could out of very little things and to remain long contented with them, not only in great part formed the power of close analysis in his mind, and the habit of steady contemplation: but rendered the power of great art over him, when he first saw it, as intense as that of magic, so that it appealed to him like a vision out of another world. As it was, the real world about him was alive, infinitely beautiful and infinitely mysterious; he longed from the beginning both to pierce its mystery and to express its joy. Thus the conditions of his early life were such as enabled him to cultivate his natural inclinations and his natural gifts to their full extent. For him snowdrops, almond blossom, lilac and laburnum, all these, and a myriad others bloomed in the little garden every year; and it was a perennial wonder to discover the first unfolding buds, a perennial prayer that frost should not touch the first opening flower.

His mother, complacently puritanical, disapproved of toys. When, one birthday, his good-natured but rather common aunt who had married the baker at Croydon presented him with a magnificent Punch and Judy show, as large as a real one, befitting thanks were publicly offered; but once the visitor had left, the delightful gift was speedily relegated to a locked cupboard, never to be seen again. A few years later, apart from a bunch of jingling keys that gave him infinite pleasure, he was allowed a cart and a ball and two boxes of wooden bricks. But this was the limit of his mother's grave concessions. Nevertheless, the bricks proved for many years a source of increasing interest; with them he reared a variety of towers and arches, which gave him a technical curiosity in matters of structure, and taught him to watch the methods of any workmen he discovered in the street with practical attention.

His life was bounded by a hedge of prohibitions, and if he disobeyed them in the slightest he was whipped. It is unlikely that these whippings were in any way severe—but they were frequent; more than anything else the propitiation by a puritanical mother of a jealous God. He was whipped if he tumbled and grazed his knees; he was whipped if he fell down stairs; and as for stealing a gooseberry or a pear, nothing could have induced him to such wickedness. His mother believed in letting him learn by his mistakes. When once his nurse was trying to prevent him from touching the pretty shadow on a copper kettle full of boiling water, she bade her not interfere; and when the child burnt his finger and screamed with fear and pain, sagely remarked that it would teach him not to make the same mistake again. Not that she was a cruel or cold-hearted woman. But she

belonged to a class and generation who deliberately perverted life through meaningless rules and artificial prohibitions. Virtue was always connected with discomfort in her mind; and her ultimate duty as a mother was to see that the child entrusted to her was not spoiled either by a spared rod or anything else.

Indeed, she took her duties as a mother with a stern, uncompromising and somewhat joyless seriousness. At twelve years of age the young poet was still complaining, in a poem entitled *Bed-time*:

“When I have drudged all day at dry perspective,  
And some nice clever book I have begun,  
Against those words there must be no invective—  
I cannot have a little bit of fun,  
For of the time Mamma’s so recollective,  
You might as well attempt to cheat the sun!  
And nothing pleasant can I then begin it,  
Mamma so regularly counts each minute.”<sup>1</sup>

Long before he was born, like Hannah with the cherished Samuel, she had dedicated her infant son to God. Now she was ardently determined that her gift should be generously amplified by a stern and pious education, and her husband, who had complete confidence in her judgment, left the training of the boy to her and never interfered. She persuaded him to read at the age of four by promising to give him a book of his own with beautiful pictures in it; and as soon as he had mastered words, set herself to familiarise him with the Bible. Day after day, until he had turned fourteen, she read the Bible with him every morning, without omission and without respite. The interminable genealogies of the Pentateuch, the embarrassing implications of the Prophets, the incomparable beauties of the gospels—these were all one. They began at the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis, and read solidly and stolidly through the sacred book, three chapters a day, until they had completed the mysterious promises and portents of the Apocalypse. Then, without pause or intermission, they solemnly began again. Her discipline and domination at those matutinal sessions were as formidable as fate. Years later<sup>2</sup> Ruskin recollected a “struggle between them of about three weeks, concerning the accent of the ‘of’ in the lines

‘Shall any following spring revive  
The ashes of the urn?’

he insisting, partly in childish obstinacy, and partly in true instinct for rhythm (being wholly careless on the subject both of *urn* and their contents), on reciting it, ‘The ashes of the urn’. It was not till after three weeks’ labour that his mother got the accent laid upon the ashes, to her mind. But had it taken three years, she would have done

<sup>1</sup> *Poems: Works*, vol. 2, p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 33; *Works*, vol. 27, p. 617.

it, having once undertaken to do it." It was thus that Ruskin acquired his extraordinary knowledge of the Bible, whose quotations later were introduced into his writings with such lavish skill. And as his mother made him repeat each phrase until his inflection showed that he had fully realised its meaning, he acquired also the priceless gift both of the symmetry and significance of noble prose.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the child accepted his mother as a protective moral force, and always implicitly obeyed her as a part of nature; but had none of the warm spontaneous love for her that a cherished and happy child usually feels; and if he lacked responsiveness, despite his sensitive and affectionate nature, it was simply because there was no natural outflow of feeling to which he could respond. She made the garden for him an Eden in which "all the fruit was forbidden"; and if, when he was busy in it at his own affairs, she came to weed or work near by, he felt a vague discomfort until he had transferred his activities some distance from her vigilant and practical eye.

With his father, however, it was somewhat different. John James Ruskin had nothing in his temperament of the arbitrary and pertinacious puritan: the difficulty was that he nurtured a secret feeling that his prim and uncompromising wife was always right. So he followed her pious lead meekly and sweetly, and in his naively ambitious way, only hoped that if their child were devoted to God, at least he would become a bishop.

In addition to his parents, the young Ruskin also had the constant ministrations of his father's devoted old nurse Anne—in many respects so like Marcel's Françoise that she might have been her prototype. "She had a natural gift and specialty for doing disagreeable things; above all, the service of a sick room; so that she was never quite in her glory unless some of us were ill. She had also some parallel specialty for *saying* disagreeable things; and might be relied upon to give the extremely darkest view of any subject, before proceeding to ameliorative action upon it. And she had a very creditable and republican aversion to doing immediately, or in set terms, as she was bid; so that when my mother and she got old together, and my mother became very imperative and particular about having her teacup set on one side of her little round table, Anne would observantly and punctiliously put it always on the other; which caused my mother to state to me, every morning after breakfast, gravely, that, if ever a woman in this world was possessed by the Devil, Anne was that woman."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the days passed in the little house at Herne Hill in a tranquil, ordered fashion that varied only with the changing of the seasons. John James, who shrewdly chose his clerks so that they combined a competence that would relieve him of all drudgery, with a lack of

<sup>1</sup>*Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, pp. 30-31.

initiative that made it impossible for them to threaten his supremacy (thus easily were great fortunes acquired in the early years of the nineteenth century), transacted all his business in the morning, and returned home every day by coach in time for dinner at half past four.

While he dined, his wife would sit opposite him, listening with a becoming gravity to the vicissitudes of the sherry trade, and no doubt offering sober admonitions and sage advice, after which, if the weather were fine, they would go out into the garden to have tea under the whiteheart cherry tree, there to be joined by the sedate and self-contained young John.

In winter, the party gathered in the parlour, and John, ensconced at his own little table in an embrasure of the window, would diligently pursue his private activities while his mother knitted and his father improved her mind with *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare, or Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, or indulged her with a rare imprudence in the poems of Byron or the novels of Scott.

Very soon John's activities were multitudinous and varied. Though his mother, who set him his lessons, let him go free, provided he had acquitted himself satisfactorily, by twelve o'clock (if he had not, she kept him in until he did), John passed the rest of the day in a state of self-chosen industry that left but little time to indulge in more frivolous diversions. In addition to his essential gifts of perception and appreciation, he had inherited from his father both a taste and an aptitude for sketching and making verses; and these his father encouraged with a rash persistence and delight that were as touching as they were dangerous.

Like so many of his later ones, John's early recorded letters are to his father, and even the first phrase of the first of them fully reveals the warm and spontaneity of his affection. At four he sent him such messages as "I love you . . . I would like you to come home . . . please bring me a whip coloured red and black . . . instead of a book."<sup>1</sup> While at eight he wrote "My dear Papa, I have missed you very much especially on sunday for though I do miss you in the evenings yet I miss you more on sunday. . . . Just as I was thinking what to say to you, I turned by chance to your picture, and it came into my mind now what can I say to give pleasure to that papa. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Four years later, he was writing: "You cannot imagine how delighted I was to receive your letter. I say you cannot imagine and neither can you. You get letters, letters, letters the whole year round. I get only one or two every year. Oh, it is a delightful sensation the cracking the seal, peeping in before you can get it open to see whether it is a long one, your very soul up at your eyes wondering what it's all about, and whether it's very funny, very comical, adventurical, steamboatical, interestical, and all other icals. . . ." This delight

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxvi n.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May 1827; *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 1-2.

and pleasure in his father was ardently reciprocated; and in a long letter to his wife written in 1831, John James concluded to his dear Margaret from his heart: "But oh, how dull and drear and unsatisfactory is the best society I fall into compared with the circle of my own Fire Side with my love sitting opposite irradiating all around her and my most extraordinary Boy filling his nook but making a more important figure by my chimney side than Gog or Magog Giants vast in Guildhall."

## 4

Nevertheless, John was a very solitary little boy. Apart from his two families of cousins, he had no friends, and even his cousins he saw but seldom. Both families, strangely enough, consisted of four boys and two girls; and in each case it was only the girls who were near to his own age. Thus during his childhood he never had any boys of his own age to play with at all. Not that he saw very much of the little girls. One family lived in Perthshire, where he visited them only occasionally; and the family at Croydon, whom he had always enjoyed seeing very much, were soon in the process of being discreetly "dropped".

It was true that if her sister Bridget was only the daughter of a public-house keeper, so was she; Margaret Ruskin admitted it to herself. But then Bridget had not spent all those years amongst the genteel intellectual society of Edinburgh. Moreover, Bridget had only married a common baker, while she had married a vintner, a very different thing. Everyone knew that the wine business was a gentleman's business—everyone knew equally well that the baking business was not. Though she never said this in so many words, the argument was so implicit in her behaviour that young John very soon inferred it; and the Richardson family of Croydon seldom, and then never, came in force to enjoy the amenities of the household at Herne Hill.

With the Richardsons of Perth it was different. For one thing, they were conveniently remote. For another, Margaret Ruskin had always considered her husband's family—connected as it was by various links with men of wealth and the learned professions—a good deal higher in the social hierarchy than her own; so visits to the Richardson house on the banks of the Tay were not forbidden. And here, in the old garden full of gooseberry bushes which sloped down to the river, and had a door which opened straight on to its clear eddying waters, in his cousin Jessie, a little girl a year older than himself, John found his first real companion. Jessie Richardson, indeed, was the one love of his childhood. It was not an ardent attachment, but it was full of sweetness. At harvest time they went gleanng together in the golden stubble of the neighbouring cornfields, "later grinding cakes of pepper bread, of quite unpurchasable quality", so that in after years Ruskin was left with the impression that the sheaves of Strath-Tay were more

golden than those to be seen in other lands, and that no harvests elsewhere so resembled the corn of heaven. Or, if the weather was wet, they would indulge in the delectable occupation of jumping down from wooden boxes; assuring each other when they were forbidden to do so of a Sunday, that when they were grown up they would be married, and jump off boxes together on the Sabbath as much as they liked.

But soon after the Ruskin family returned home from one of their visits, Jessie fell ill and died of water on the brain. John was eight years old at the time, and never referred to the loss. But he must have thought about it and felt about it a good deal more than is suggested in *Praeterita*, since nearly three years later he wrote *On the Death of my Cousin Jessie*, an Ossianic poem in her memory. Imitative though it may be, it is a remarkable production for a boy of eleven.

"Oh, ye restless deeps, that continually roll on thy everlasting waves, swell the moaning of thy waves, and the harmony of your billows, to a dirge for her who is departed!

For, colder than the foam, which, not so pure as her spirit, is rising on the crest of thy billows, she reposes in the grave.

Oh, ye winds of heaven, breathe in melancholy notes a song of death!

Truth is departed, beauty is withered in the grave.

She, whose step was lighter than the roe's, and whose eye was brighter than the eaglet,—her dust is consigned to the dust: she is gone to a home from which she shall not return; to a rest which is eternal, to a peace which is unbroken.

She is freed from her sufferings; she is released from her pains.

Why should I mourn for her who is departed? She is not consigned to the dust,—she is not given to the grave!

She is not a prey to the worms, and her beauty is not departed!

Her soul is ethereal, her spirit is with its God. She is fairer and purer than on earth.

Why should I mourn for the spirit which is returned to its Maker?

I will not mourn; I will rejoice for her who is praising her Creator,—who is joining in the harmony of heaven."

Shortly after Jessie's death, her mother also died. The Richardson family being now disintegrated, the older boys going to follow their respective vocations, Mrs. Ruskin decided to adopt the remaining daughter, Mary. So when John was ten, his fourteen-year-old cousin came to Herne Hill to take up a position which was half that of an elder sister, and half that of a governess. Mary Richardson was a plain, clumsy, good-natured, completely ordinary girl; diligent, inoffensive and pathetically lacking in charm. Treated with the charity of the puritanical evangelical churchwoman—the charity of duty rather than of affection—she lived in the Ruskin household until the time of John's marriage, when she married herself, and died shortly afterwards; and her influence upon the family circle was

negligible. Not only did Mrs. Ruskin not love her adopted daughter, but she did not try to conceal the difference in her feelings for her foster-daughter and her son. John was the little prince, the incipient bishop, the heir to the sherry fortune: Mary was but a very humble attendant, who had been dutifully given a comfortable home. But she accepted the position, resigned and uncomplaining, probably because she had no alternative; and henceforward Mrs. Ruskin had another assistant at the daily Bible readings, and another victim upon whom to assert her self-righteous and indomitable will.

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## Chapter II

1. *The infant prodigy: first travels: a busy life: parental prohibitions: early education—Dr. Andrews, the Rev. Thomas Dale, Mr. Rowbotham: his passion for geology: Charles Richardson: his death.* 2. *Rogers' "Italy": Prout's "Sketches in Flanders and Italy": foreign tours: his sensibility and intelligence: Schaffhausen.* 3. *Early compositions—geological and poetic: pungent prose sketches: John James' parental pride.* 4. *The draughtsman: lessons with Runciman and Copley-Fielding: the joys of the artist life.* 5. *Social life at Herne Hill: his friendship with his father.*

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I

AT TEN years of age John Ruskin was a handsome, healthy-looking boy, slim, with auburn hair, sensitive blue eyes, and an expression at once inquisitive, gentle and intelligent. Only his mouth made him look surly: it had been bitten by a dog, and although the wound soon healed, it left behind a scar of such dimensions that in later life people sometimes referred to him as "the man with the hare-lip". His parents had already had his portrait twice painted by Northcote, once at the age of three, and again two years later.

From the beginning Ruskin was an unusual child, and between them, his parents turned him into an infant prodigy. At the age of seven he was already producing verse, and composed the well-known *Harry and Lucy*, a work inspired by Maria Edgeworth's children's books combined with Joyce's *Scientific Dialogues*. This was written in a small ruled notebook, in imitation print, with illustrations purporting to be "copper plates" in the author's hand. Of four intended volumes he completed one and a quarter.

But the greatest educative force of Ruskin's childhood were the journeys which he made from his earliest years in company with his parents.

John James Ruskin was a shrewd man. By electing himself his own traveller, he not only ensured for himself the best salesmanship available, but was able also to combine business with pleasure and indulge his personal tastes without expense. He therefore set out with his wife and child for two months every year, either in his partner's carriage, or else in one hired and fitted out specially for the occasion, to promote the sales of sherry and enjoy, at the same time, a leisurely tour of rural England. Perched up in the little "dickey" with his old nurse Anne, young John would watch the familiar streets of Camberwell disappear, pity all the inhabitants of Peckham who were not



going with them, and stare with a rapture of delight that alternated with an eager curiosity at the transient beauties of the wayside scene. A lonely cottage perched on a hill, a gnarled tree outlined against a summer sky, speeding clouds behind leafy boughs—all these aroused a continual wonder and a quick delight. When they came to a beauty spot of special interest, the little party halted, and picnicked on the top of a mountain, in the glade of a wood, or on the shore of a solemn lake. When they came to a mansion or a castle, John James would order the driver boldly to pull up, and with lavish tips to janitor, housekeeper or butler, secure the party a leisurely sight of the pictures and works of art within. The routine of these tours was always as orderly as the orbits of the planets. They started early enough in the morning, often at six o'clock, to arrive at their next place of destination for four o'clock dinner, and never travelled less than forty, or more than fifty, miles a day.

Filled with new impressions of these journeys—of the Welsh Mountains, the Scottish Lowlands, or the Cumberland Lakes, the child would return home with a cherished collection of "specimens" that he had picked up on the way, and full of eagerness to transfer his enthusiasm to paper.

The joy of staring at the sea or scampering on the moor had always impelled him to try to communicate it in some sort of melodious noise, and his early poetic efforts were indiscriminately industrious as to the escape of a mouse, or the dreariness of Scotch moors, the beauties of Glenfarg, or the meaning of Time. At eight he hymned the sun, and at nine he presented his father with a set of birthday verses, and was lavish in blank verse on Derwent Water and Skiddaw; while at ten he wrote half a dozen poems on a variety of themes. And in the same year he also composed a less solemn work: *The Puppet Show; or, Amusing Characters for Children. With Coloured Plates by John Ruskin*—a piece who first character, significantly enough, was St. George of England, whose power will "serve to save".<sup>1</sup>

All this, to say nothing of his interest in minerals and plants, which he collected and observed with persevering enthusiasm, was looked upon with approbation by his parents. True, there were times when his mother warned him that he would "weary out his brain". But at the same time they each stimulated his activities, not only with lavish praise, but by paying him for his work at the rate of a halfpenny a page for copying out Pope's Homer, and a penny for every twenty lines of original composition. Thus, at ten years old, the talented, eager and industrious young John was writing to his father: "I do believe that the last year of my life was the happiest; and shall I tell you why? Because I had more to do than I could do without cramming and ramming, and wishing days were longer and sheets of paper broader. . . . I do think, indeed I am sure, that in common things

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxxiii.

it is having too much to do which constitutes happiness, and too little, unhappiness."<sup>1</sup>

The following year, the family tour included a visit to the Lakes, and here the embryo poet saw two of his distinguished contemporaries. Southey had "eyes black as coal, a nose hooked like an eagle's and sharp at the end" and a "dark lightning eye" that made him seem "half inspired, or 'vengefully fired' like his own Thalaba".<sup>2</sup> While Wordsworth, whose intense and innocent joy in the natural world young John shared to so remarkable a degree, appeared in Rydal chapel one Sunday to be nothing but a somnolent old gentleman with a long face and a large nose, who was disappointing even to the stolid Mary. This tour was later reviewed in the *Ileriad, or Three Weeks among the Lakes*, a vast poem in rhyming couplets of over two thousand lines, which was written between 28 November, 1830 and 11 January, 1832, from the notes he and Mary had made in a joint diary. When he had at last finished the "notable deed", young John, as he told his father in a letter, "cut capers all the remainder of the evening".

Of course his childhood was not composed entirely of precocious industry and pious prohibitions. He was sometimes taken to the pantomime, and even given a supper afterwards of puff tarts, ham, and oyster patties. But such treats were rare, and his pleasures circumscribed by the frequent presence of adults, and his parents' precautionary fears. Moreover, the pleasure of three days a week was completely spoiled by the thought of Sunday; for he "always had a way of looking forward to things, and a lurid shade was cast over the whole of Friday and Saturday by the horrible sense that Sunday was coming, and inevitable".<sup>3</sup> Sunday, indeed, was a relentless fate which crushed the whole household, making it forbidden either to play, or draw, or read, or write or amuse himself in any conceivable interesting or agreeable manner. He was never permitted to indulge even in the pleasures familiar to solitary boys. It was forbidden to go to the edge of a pond, or even to enter a field where there was a pony. At the seaside he was allowed neither to row nor to sail, and if he walked too near the harbour alone there was an uproar, so that little in the way of amusement was left him but staring in wonderment at the sea. Indeed, the two great adventures of his childhood were being bitten by the dog, and falling, head downwards, into the domestic water butt. As he remarked bitterly to a friend in later life: "My parents debarred me from all exercise except walking. They wouldn't let me ride lest I should be thrown. Boating was dangerous because I might be drowned, and boxing my mother thought a vulgar form of exercise." This parental self-indulgence, in which excessive affection was confused with and justified by the idea of duty, was applied

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.5.1829: *Works*, vol. 2, p. xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 24: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 421.

equally to the young Ruskin's education. He was never sent away to school, and from the time when he escaped from the daily lessons (but not the Bible reading) of his mother until the time he went up to Oxford, he was subjected to an erratic period of ineffective learning interrupted frequently by illness or by foreign tours.

His first tutor was the amiable and evangelical Dr. Andrews, minister of the Beresford Chapel, Walworth. The Ruskins were by far the grandest of the congregation. They sent the minister handsome presents, and showed themselves generally and discreetly attentive. When the Doctor called one day, bringing one of his charming daughters with him, young John liked him. And as the Doctor enjoyed the reputation in the neighbourhood of being a man of learning, John's parents presently solicited the favour of his occasional presence at the house as their son's preceptor.

John was delighted; and Dr. Andrews, who, it appears, had little Latin and less Greek, taught his pupil to scan the verses of Virgil and Anacreon, recited to him passages of Shakespeare in an impressive manner, and kept him amused by practical similes in which he compared Neptune's trident to John's lifting up a potato with a fork, or taking a piece of bread out of a bowl of milk with a spoon. "Every lesson I get I like him better," the boy wrote joyously to a neighbourly lady who sometimes pitied him; "I am always delighted when Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are come".<sup>1</sup>

It soon became evident, however, that these innocent flirtations with the classics were scarcely adequate to the requirements of a future Oxford graduate and an embryo bishop; so very soon the good Dr. Andrews was courteously dismissed, and young John sent as a day boy to a private school in Camberwell kept by the Rev. Thomas Dale. Thomas Dale was not only Incumbent of St. Matthew's Chapel, Denmark Hill, Professor of English Language and Literature, and Divinity Lecturer at London University, but also the author of *Widow of Nain, and other Poems*, and of a prolific supply of devotional and educational works. A tall, slender man, with firm, square features, a broad forehead, and blue eyes, he concealed humour and kindness of heart beneath a somewhat stern and affectedly impressive manner. Mr. Dale, however, early offended his new pupil not only by referring contemptuously to his carefully thumbled grammar as "a Scotch thing", but also on account of his habit of beating his son Tom hard over the head with the edge of a grammar, because "Tom could not construe a Latin verse, when the rev. gentleman ought only with extreme tenderness and pitifulness to have explained to Tom that—he wasn't Thomas the Rhymer".<sup>2</sup> Thus John learned from him "only because he had to". Nevertheless this "severest and chiefly antagonist master"<sup>3</sup> later became the recipient of several long and com-

<sup>1</sup> Letter, undated, 1829. *Works*, vol. 36, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 94: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. lii.

municative letters, so he could scarcely have been as objectionable as the affronted Ruskin would have us suppose.

Dale's was a small school of modest curriculum. It dealt only with the classics; and at first the pupils numbered but six in all, two of whom were the schoolmaster's sons, and the other three his boarders, though later a few more day boys seem to have arrived. Thus Ruskin was an outsider, walking down with a blue bag of books and his father every morning, and returning home regularly for dinner at half past one with some modest task to be prepared in the evening for the following day. In consequence he saw but little of his fellow pupils, who treated him almost as if he had been a girl, "the fountain of pure conceit in his own heart sustaining him serenely against all depreciation".

To augment these studies in English and the classics, a second tutor appeared at Herne Hill upon two evenings a week. He was a painstaking, meritorious and asthmatic gentleman named Rowbotham, who had to be fortified after climbing the hill with lavish cups of tea, and who taught his pupil the subjects of French and mathematics. Assisted by his wife and "various impediments and inconveniences in the way of children", Mr. Rowbotham kept an Academy for the Sons of Gentleman near the Elephant and Castle, at which he imparted Latin, French and German grammar and the use of globes; industriously composing text books in his spare time, and barely earning a modest pittance by this patient drudgery.

These curious lessons, supplemented by a course of lectures in English logic, literature and translation at King's College, London, on three days a week, where Thomas Dale had by then obtained a lectureship, constituted all the early education Ruskin ever received which was not acquired by himself. Evidently it did him little harm, and left him free to pursue his own interests untrammelled by academic prejudices and restrictions. For his own interests were already those that were to remain vivid until the end of his life—art and draughtsmanship, literary composition, botany, geology and mineralogy. At this period, his chief interest was geology. If he nurtured any formulated ambition during his boyhood, it was that he should one day become President of the Geological Society, for which position he prepared himself by compiling a Mineralogical Dictionary. By the time he was twelve, and knew the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and most of the Apocalypse more or less by heart, all sorts of new privileges were conferred upon him. He was allowed to sip the paternal sherry; to go to a theatre; and, on rare occasions, to dine with his parents in state at four o'clock; when, at dessert, John James would regale the little company with the exploits of Don Juan. But when, asked one evening what he would like to hear most, young Ruskin answered Juan and Haidée, embarrassed glances passed between his parents, and they dubiously shook their heads at such a choice.

Unfortunately, this advance from childhood to boyhood did little to procure for him the pleasures of friendship. At Dale's, there was the son of a Major Matson who occasionally came to Denmark Hill to dine, or carried Ruskin off to his family at Woolwich; and later, the son of a neighbour, a boy named Richard Fall, came sometimes during the holidays to do any lessons he might have at the table in young Ruskin's study (who had long since acquired the privilege and dignity of a workroom to himself) or to go walking after lunch accompanied by their favourite dog. But they never became much more than congenial acquaintances.

The one great affection of his early youth, was for his cousin Charles, the youngest son of the baker of Croydon, a handsome, intelligent and affectionate youth with a ruddy complexion and crisply curling hair, who had acquired correct speech and the manners of polite society to an extent that made him not unwelcome at the Herne Hill house for dinner on a Sunday. Charles, it was plain to his family at an early age, was far too accomplished to be a baker. So after various councils, he had been apprenticed to Smith, Elder & Co. of Cornhill, then one of the most successful publishers of the day; after which he became a regular visitor to the Ruskins. That the young Ruskin should become deeply attached to him was inevitable. He had a genuine passion for letters; he accepted his cousin's admiration with a brotherly tenderness, and reciprocated his affection with unselfconscious simplicity. He would often bring with him the latest and most ambitious publications of his firm, particularly if they were illustrated with the fine engravings which he knew gave John so much pleasure. He took an interest both in his compositions and his collection of minerals. But Charles was ambitious as well as gifted, and it soon became apparent to him that there were scant prospects of advancement for him in the firm of Smith, Elder & Co. Following the example of a successful elder brother, therefore, he decided to emigrate to Australia. But in a fierce prolonged storm before his ship set sail, he left it in a small boat which overturned, and was drowned. It was a bitter blow to John Ruskin. Charles had gone the way of Jessie; the way that all were to go whom he most deeply loved. He kept his sorrow to himself. But for many a day it closed his heart.

## 2

The minds of great men are seldom formed by academic education; nor do the influences which most deeply shape their thoughts and determine their future work often come through any determined channel. Thus it was chance that initiated the trend of Ruskin's early significant enthusiasms. The earth was naturally rich and industriously well prepared. The seed, fine and fertile, flourished apace in so nourishing a soil.

In 1832, his father's partner, Henry Telford, gave him as a present for his thirteenth birthday a copy of Rogers' *Italy*. The first volume of this book, which was to have so deep an effect upon Ruskin's future, had appeared anonymously in 1822. It met with but scant success, and the second volume which came out in 1828 was even more completely swamped in the contemporary tempest of Byronic adulation. Rogers, unused to neglect, set himself to command success. He ordered the unsold copies of his book to be burnt, and for two years devoted his whole attention to the production of a lavishly illustrated *de luxe* edition that should create a sensation. He patiently revised the verses, adding much fresh material, and commissioned the finest artists of the day to make drawings for the steel engravings that were to embellish the book. Twenty-five of these plates were from drawings by Turner, twenty from drawings by Stothard, two from drawings by Prout, and two from celebrated pictures by Titian and Vasari.

The cost of producing the new edition of the work was nearly £7,500. But so successful was it that in a few years a substantial profit had been made, and Rogers decided to produce a new edition of his *Poems* in a similar manner. Thus it was that the work of Turner was for the first time made familiar to the general public, and Rogers recaptured a taste of his old fame. "Your *Italy* can nowhere out of your own family be more eagerly expected than in this house," wrote Wordsworth to the author. "The poetry is excellent, we know, and the embellishments, as they are under the guidance of your own taste, must do honour to the *arts*."<sup>1</sup> Scott sent his best thanks for "your beautiful verses on Italy which are embellished by such beautiful specimens of architecture as form a rare specimen of the manner in which the art of poetry can awake the Muse of Painting. It is in every respect a *bijou*"<sup>2</sup>; while Macaulay averred that "such a series of illustrations I never saw or expected to see. I used to say that if your Italy were dug up in some Pompeii or Herculaneum two thousand years hence, it would give to posterity a higher idea of the state of the arts amongst us than anything else which lay in an equally small compass".<sup>3</sup>

Such was the general impression of the volume which now delighted the young Ruskin, and was to influence so greatly the elaborate production of his later works. Indeed, no sooner had he opened the book than he must start at once to copy the engravings in fine pen shading. He had already gained considerable experience in such work through laborious imitations of the work of Cruikshank. But now Turner completely captivated him and dominated his artistic tastes. It was also at about the same time, that Prout published his *Sketches in*

<sup>1</sup> P. W. Clayden, *Rogers and His Contemporaries* (1889), vol. 2, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

*Flanders and Italy*, and Ruskin went with his father to the shop to admire the specimen print offered for exhibition, and to put down their name on the list of subscribers. When the book arrived, it too afforded father and son such exquisite and innocent pleasure, that Mrs. Ruskin was impelled to ask why, for their next holiday, they should not make a continental tour to see some of the places it described. The suggestion was at once seized with enthusiasm.

So, after three weeks of "entirely rapturous and amazed preparation",<sup>1</sup> the party—comprising Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin, John and Mary and the old nurse Anne—set out. Of this first tour in 1833, by Calais and Brussels to Cologne; up the Rhine to Strasbourg, across the Black Forest to Schaffhausen, and thence by all the fine old towns of Switzerland—Basle, Bern, Interlaken, Lucerne, Zurich and Constance, down into Italy; back to Geneva by the Simplon, and home by way of Chamouni, Lyons and Dijon—which was but the prototype of many others which differed from it only by greater or lesser elaboration of the original itinerary—Ruskin said later: that he had certainly more passionate happiness of a quality utterly indescribable to people who never felt the like, and more, in solid quantity, in those three months, than most people have in all their lives.

The family travelled *en prince*, usually doing a leisurely forty miles a day, and a vivid picture can be reconstructed from the various unfinished fragments which the industrious John wrote during these early years. Each of the party reacted to the vicissitudes of the journey in characteristic style. Mrs. Ruskin sat bolt upright from morn till night, industriously absorbed impressions or imperviously marched on ahead when, during an excursion, husband or son halted to gaze enraptured at some particular view; ushered her family relentlessly to church every Sunday (when of course all travelling was forbidden); complained at meals of the sinister foreign made-up messes (at home she fed them on plain roasts and fresh vegetables from the garden always perfectly cooked) and gently fussed whenever John strolled too far away unaccompanied by an attendant. John James made unimaginative practical arrangements, complained of prices, dutifully enacted his role of good provider, was always on the lookout for a sight of Lord This or Lady That on the opposite landing, and quietly enjoyed the new impressions, his paternal pride continually enhanced when John made unusually appreciative remarks or expressed original views. Mary was preoccupied with her clothes, full of apprehensions as to bad weather, wondered, with stolid, good-natured indifference to the greatest beauties, whether, if they lingered longer, they might not miss their dinner. Old Anne pottered and complained; took charge of coats and cloaks, aired her personal brand of semi-intelligible pseudo-French, continually wondered why people should put themselves out to cross seas and scale mountains if this was all there was

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 79.

to it: and John was in one long glorious youthful enchantment of delight. He gazed spellbound; he observed with deliberate intent; he knocked off bits of rock with his little geological hammer, he filled notebooks with impressions and he made copious sketches of what most appealed to him. Armed with his personal array of tools—paints and brushes, portfolios and sketching blocks, notebooks, diaries, geological impedimenta and scientific instruments of his own ingenious devising (such as the cyanometer with which he determined the exact shade of the sky and each day recorded his findings in a journal) he applied himself to his various interests with unclouded joy. Like most great men, Ruskin was always possessed of acute powers of self-observation, and when later he wrote that as a boy he had “vialfuls, as it were, of Wordsworth’s reverence, Shelley’s sensitiveness and Turner’s accuracy all in one”, he said nothing more than truth. “A snowdrop was to me as to Wordsworth part of the Sermon on the Mount; but I never should have written sonnets to the celandine, because it is of a coarse yellow, and imperfect form. With Shelley, I loved blue sky and blue eyes, but never in the least confused the heavens with my own poor little Psychidion. And the reverence and passion were alike kept in their places by the constructive Turnerian element, and I did not weary myself in wishing that a daisy could see the beauty of its shadow, but in trying to draw the shadow rightly myself.”<sup>1</sup>

## 3

From a very early age, there can be seen in all Ruskin’s compositions a struggle between two powerful and opposed forces—between the expression of essential emotions and perceptions and the expression of idiosyncrasies acquired through the education and experience of the personal man. This duality exists, and can be studied, in the works of all great writers. It was Tolstoy who said that one of his greatest difficulties in composition was to avoid writing from the top of his mind: that is to say, deliberately to express fundamental understanding, rather than transient opinion coloured by personal emotion—the objective rather than the subjective. But in few great writers is this duality so apparent as in the works of Ruskin, where it is of a particularly complicated nature, since it involves in the first place a difference in level of understanding, and in the second, a difference in level of motive. This means that, although he was not clearly aware of it himself, Ruskin’s writing throughout his whole life was of two different orders, both of which are often to be found mixed on the same page. The writing of the first order involves the expression of essential experience and essential understanding, usually emotional in origin; the second, theories based upon acquired opinions and habitual, involuntary reactions. The one is the outcome of authentic

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113.



inspiration; the other of such personal weaknesses as vanity, imitation and the desire for praise.

For this reason nearly all Ruskin's early spontaneous diary notes have value, and most of his laboriously composed verses have none.

For these foreign tours were necessarily the cause of much subsequent activity. The geologist soon expressed himself in two papers—*On the Causes of the Colour of the Water in the Rhine*, and *Facts and Considerations on the Strata of Mont Blanc*, both of which were printed in the latter months of the following year; and after the second tour of 1835, further geological papers were contributed to London's *Magazine of Natural History*, the first of which bore the clear but cumbersome title: *To what Properties in Nature is it owing that the Stones in Buildings, Formed Originally of the Frailiest Materials, gradually become indurated by exposure to the atmosphere and by age, and stand the wear and tear of time and weather every bit as well, in some instances much better, than the hardest and most compact limestones and granite?*<sup>1</sup> The publication of the first of these (save for some childish verses in a local magazine) was Ruskin's first literary success, and in later years he recalled his father rushing upstairs to the drawing-room with wet and flashing eyes, flourishing the proof sheet with affectionate excitement, and observing, as if to excuse his state—"It's—it's—only print".

Ruskin had asked for Saussure's *Voyages dans les Alpes* to be given him for his fifteenth birthday present, and henceforward he devoted much of his time to studying the minerals in the British Museum.

But the young poet was even more prolific. Of the first tour in 1833 he wrote no less than thirty poems, each addressed to a different resting place on the journey, or descriptive of some particularly striking scene; while the second tour he fully intended to commemorate in Byronic verse "in the style of *Don Juan* artfully combined with that of *Childe Harold*". Two cantos of this work were completed with characteristic facility and skill, "carrying him across France to Chamouni—where he broke down, finding that he had exhausted on the Jura all the descriptive terms at his disposal, and that none were left for the Alps".<sup>2</sup> For a youth of his age, these were all remarkable productions. But they are remarkable for little more than the energy and precocity which they display, there being little in them either spontaneous or vital. The fragments of prose with which the earlier verses are interspersed, on the other hand, are full of the delicate pungent humour which was to be one of the characteristic charms of his later work. With sprightly irony he noted that "the *Hotel de Bellevue* at Brussels ought to have a *belle vue*, for you might as well scale the crags of Gibraltar as storm the heights of the *Hotel de Bellevue*; whence, for all the boast of its title, I never could

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 396.

discover more than a dusty square, some formal houses, and a few murky park trees".<sup>1</sup> At Aix-la-Chapelle he saw "Charlemagne's easy chair—arms stone, back stone, hard, independent, unaccommodating granite. Thin velvet cushion, however, on the seat as a mediator. Very ancient affair; product of the dark ages, I suppose."<sup>2</sup> Mature, too, are many of the stray reflections, even when the style in which they are expressed is affected. "It is very provoking, the charms of a place always increase in geometrical ratio as you get farther from it, and therefore 'tis a rich pleasure to look back on anything, though it be with a dash of regret. It is singular that almost all pleasure is past, or coming." Yet more characteristic and notable are the passages of noble prose which suddenly spring from the pen of the lad of fifteen, when he is unhampered by the convention of finding rhymes. Here is one of them. "There is not another scene like Chamouni throughout all Switzerland. In no other spot that I have seen is the rich luxuriance of the cultivated valley, the flashing splendour of the eternal snow, the impending magnificence of the bare, spiry crag, and the strange, cold rigidity of the surgy glaciers so dreadfully and beautifully combined. There is silence unbroken, no thunder of the avalanche comes crashing from the recesses of the hills, there is no voice from the chasmy glacier, no murmur from the thousand mountain streams, you are in solitude, a strange unearthly solitude, but you feel as if the air were full of spirits."<sup>3</sup> Then he relinquishes such fine passages, with the stamp of feeling and the felicity of aptly chosen epithet upon each phrase, for hundreds of lines of characterless imitative verse beginning:

"The wreathing clouds are fleeting fast.

Deep shade upon the hills they cast. . . ."

This was a pity; for while pages of verse were duly pumped out, a prose work entitled *Chronicles of St. Bernard* which he planned was very soon laid aside to give place to other teeming interests.

To James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, who had recently visited Herne Hill, John James wrote on 22 January, 1834: "To you I will venture to say that the youth you were kind enough to notice gives promise of very considerable talent. His faculty of composition is unbounded; without, however, any very strong indication of originality. He writes verse and prose continually, check him as we will. . . . That I may not select, I send his last eighty or one hundred lines, produced in one hour, while he waited for me in the city. Do not say we are fostering a poetical plant or genius to say *we keep a poet*. It is impossible for any parents to make less of a gift than we do of

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 382.

this. . . ."<sup>1</sup> But such ingenuous and touching words only reveal the parental error which they would decry: and if Ruskin viewed with doubt the prospect of becoming a bishop, the prospect of becoming another Byron was seductive in the extreme.

## 4

Ruskin had early displayed an aptitude for drawing. At nine he was copying maps with a diligent and passionate enthusiasm. A year later he was imitating with no less patient zeal Cruikshank's vignettes to Grimm's German stories. These were discarded for Turner, as we have seen, as soon as he had been presented with the treasured *Italy*; and thenceforward he took even greater pains with his drawing than he did with his writing. In 1831, he was promoted to his first drawing lessons; these being given him by the agreeable but quite unremarkable Mr. Runciman, who, having failed to inculcate any great love of art or originality of delineation into the talentless, indifferent, though painstaking Mary, was now suffered to try his hand with the ardent and industrious John. But John had been used to exercising a gift of "drawing delicately with the pen point", and did not at all care for the "mannered and inefficient" drawings of his master that he was required to imitate. Later he declared that such coercion "greatly broke the force both of his heart and hand".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Mr. Runciman taught him the elements of perspective and the theory of composition, and cultivated in him the habit of noticing essentials of form and quickly and accurately committing them to paper. His progress was swift and substantial, and some of the drawings which he brought back with him from the tour of 1835 were of such promise that John James considered that he would be justified in giving his son the benefit of the tuition of a real artist. He had by now acquired, for the "tremendous sum for us, of forty-seven guineas",<sup>3</sup> a water-colour sketch by Copley Fielding—Between King's House and Inveroran, Argyllshire—and this gave so much delight both to himself and to young John that it was decided that his son should have the benefit from him of the usual course of six lessons. So on several different occasions father and son repaired together to the artist's studio in Newman Street, John devoting himself to an hour's ardent practice with the brush, while Copley Fielding made agreeable conversation to the shrewd and well-informed vintner, who was so gratifyingly an admirer of his work. So pleasant and so profitable were the lessons that the usual number prolonged itself to half as many again, while John acquired the art of laying on his colour, and copying with fair accuracy a drawing which his master made

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 213.

before his eyes. But he soon discovered that this new art was less easy to acquire than he had imagined; that with all his care and ardour his own efforts resembled very little those of Fielding, and when the course was finally over, he returned for several years to the use of the pencil, with which in after years he executed many works of great delicacy and individual charm.

Meanwhile, he was full of arbitrary artistic theories, and this was the innocent and arrogant period of which he was to write in one of his Oxford Lectures: "A long time ago, before ever I had seen Oxford, I painted a picture of the Lake of Como for my father. It was not at all like the Lake of Como; but I thought it rather the better for that. My father differed with me; and objected particularly to a boat with a red and yellow awning, which I had put into the most conspicuous corner of my drawing. I declared this boat to be 'necessary to the composition'. My father not the less objected that he had never seen such a boat, whether at Como or elsewhere: and suggested that if I would make the lake look a little more like water, I should be under no necessity of explaining its nature by the presence of floating objects. I thought him at the time a very simple person for his pains; but have since learned . . . that the great point of painting a lake is—to get it to look like water."<sup>1</sup>

## 5

Other than the amenities of foreign travel and the delights of art, there were few distractions in Ruskin's isolated and pre-occupied adolescence at Herne Hill. Almost the only people who visited the house were connected with the sherry trade: country retail buyers, an occasional colleague or even rarer partner. John James had been too concerned with getting on in the world before his marriage to have many congenial friends, and despite her intercourse with the polite circles of Edinburgh, his wife was never able to outgrow her sense of social inferiority.

Thus, just as in boyhood when he had written to his father in the somewhat inflated language he was then affecting: "Really, sir, I think the drawing-room, withdrawing-room, or room into which I withdraw to draw, owes all its beauty to your presence. We have sat in it two nights, and the vacancy of the throne which you are wont to fill, and from which thou art wont to impart the learning contained in the volumes of literature, enlivening it by your conversation and facilitating its comprehension by your remarks, the vacancy of that chair, I say, made the room appear vacant, and the absence of that conversation made conversation flag;" so still Ruskin's chief and most affectionate companion was his father. "You were wont now and then, Papa, in former times," he wrote him as a lad of sixteen when John

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 20, p. 283.

James was away on some business affair, "to give me a great deal of pleasure by writing me one or two letters in the course of your journey. Now, if you had a little spare scrap of time (Mama says you do not write because I do not ask you), you know, my dearest Father, it would infinitely delight your most affectionate son."<sup>1</sup> And on his father's birthday, John would celebrate the occasion with an appropriate poem apostrophising the happy month:

". . . More deeply blue thy sky above,—  
More soft each songster's lay of love,—  
For in thy blooming month, fair May,  
I hail my father's natal day."<sup>2</sup>

Nor was he able to any extent to emancipate himself from the tender attachment which made it almost impossible for him to leave home. When James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, invited him to stay with him in Scotland, Ruskin replied with great politeness that though the invitation was one which it "would have been such a pleasure, such an honour for him to have accepted", and "he loved Scotland, loved the sight and the thought of the blue hills, for among them he had passed some of the happiest days of his short life", yet he could not "at this period make up his mind to leave his parents even for a short time".<sup>3</sup> "Hitherto I have scarcely left them for a day, and I wish to be with them as much as possible till it is necessary for me to go to the university." These lines were written some three years before he actually went to Oxford, but he adhered to the sentiments expressed in them until the last. Perhaps, dutiful and affectionate son that he was, he hoped that in Oxford days he might know both the pleasures of absence and the pleasures of reunion. But if this were so, he was to be grievously disappointed.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.3.1836: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 339.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxviii.

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## Chapter III

1. *The great Rogers: an unsuccessful visit.* 2. *First love—Adèle: youthful love lyrics: melancholy at her indifference.*

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I  
STRANGELY enough, it was through the socially ineligible cousins of Croydon that Ruskin was first introduced to the great literary figure of his day. Before his death, Charles Richardson, efficiently performing his humble duties in the firm of Smith, Elder & Co., won the attention of the poetaster Thomas Pringle, a pious Scotch missionary, who edited for the firm their polite and fashionable annual *Friendship's Offering*. This magazine was "a delicately printed, lustrously bound, and elaborately illustrated small octavo volume, representing, after its manner, the poetical and artistic inspiration of the age", Ruskin wrote later in *My First Editor*.<sup>1</sup> "It may be summed up by saying that the ancient Annual was written by meekly-minded persons, who felt that they knew nothing about anything and did not want to know more. . . . It was enough for the editor of *Friendship's Offering* if he could gather for his Christmas Bouquet a little pastoral story, suppose, by Miss Mitford, a dramatic sketch by the Rev. George Croly, a few sonnets or impromptu stanzas to music by the gentlest lovers and maidens of his acquaintance, and a legend of the Apennines or romance of the Pyrenees by some adventurous traveller who had penetrated into the recesses of those mountains, and would modify the traditions of the country to introduce a plate by Clarkson Stanfield or J. D. Harding."

After a short acquaintance, Charles began to speak with cousinly pride and admiration of the remarkable compositions of the youthful prodigy of Herne Hill; and such was the interest expressed by the poet-editor, that he was soon invited as an honoured guest to join the Ruskins at their Sunday dinner. Apparently he was less impressed by the performances of which he had heard so much than was the eulogious Charles. Indeed, "he was the first person who intimated to my father and mother with some decision," wrote Ruskin later, "that there were as yet no wholly trustworthy indications of my one day occupying a higher place in English literature than either Milton or Byron; and accordingly I think none of us attached much importance to his opinions."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he had sufficient esteem for the romantic sensibilities of John James, and the sincere veneration

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Prætorius: Works*, vol. 35, p. 92.

for the evangelical faith of Mrs. Ruskin, in which he was himself an ardent believer, to become a not infrequent visitor to their house, and to interest himself in the future education of young John. He read his more finished productions, carefully criticised his verses, discussed with him the merits and demerits of the more respected masters of their craft, and, since he had a slight acquaintance with Scott, Wordsworth and Rogers, finally decided to take his protégé, as a "sacred Eleusinian initiation and Delphic pilgrimage",<sup>1</sup> to pay his respects in person to the most courted and most revered man of letters of the time.

Now that the name of Rogers has sunk into oblivion, it is difficult to imagine the magic that it must have exerted upon the imagination of an aspiring poet at the period when it was at its splendid zenith. In 1803, when barely forty, Rogers had established himself in princely splendour in a magnificent house in St. James' Place. At once rich (he was partner in a prosperous family banking business), talented, successful and unmarried, for the next half century he occupied in London society a position unparalleled before or since. The *Pleasures of Memory* was in 1803 still at the height of its popularity. Eleven years after its publication, the fourteenth edition of two thousand copies had just been called for: and not to have read it meant to proclaim yourself uncultured and a boor. Invitations to his famous dinner-, and his even more famous breakfast-parties were solicited eagerly not only by distinguished visitors to London from the provinces, but by those who came from Europe and from the United States.

For over fifty years Rogers was surrounded not only by brilliant and fashionable beauties, by the greatest statesmen, the greatest painters, and the greatest poets; but by a host of conversationalists and wits whose names, long since forgotten, were once uttered with appreciation in the most exclusive drawing-rooms. Dr. Burney, writing of him in 1804, said: "He gives the best dinners to the best company of men of talents and genius I know."<sup>2</sup> Fox, Sheridan, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Kemble, Mme. de Stael, Opie, Fuseli were amongst his intimates. He had met Talleyrand and Mme. de Genlis: he was on congenial terms with the Duke of Wellington. For years he had been the oracle of the circle of Holland House, called by Macaulay "the favourite resort of wits and beauties, of painters and poets, of scholars, philosophers and statesmen":<sup>3</sup> and the historian was quite surprised that "such men as Lord Granville, Lord Holland, Hobhouse, Lord Byron, and others of high rank and intellect, should place Rogers, as they do, above Southey, Moore, and even Scott himself".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>2</sup> P. W. Clayden, *Rogers and His Contemporaries*, vol. i, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

It was into this magnificent mansion that the young Ruskin, a self-confident but unsophisticated youth who had seldom paid a polite call before in his life, was suddenly led one day by the good-natured and aspiring Pringle. By now Rogers was an old man and completely bald. He was seventy-five, and "no one ever thought him a moment younger". Carlyle, meeting him about this time, found him "a half frozen old sardonic Whig gentleman" with "no hair at all, but one of the whitest bare scalps, blue eyes, shrewd, sad and cruel; toothless horseshoe mouth drawn up to the very nose: slow croaking, sarcastic insight, perfect breeding. . . ." His enemies, indeed, said that he had a face like a death's head, and terrified people by his ugliness. He had himself remarked several years ago that so many of his friends were dead that for him to stroll through the streets of London was like walking in a cemetery. Yet his manner was gentle and gracious; and his eyes gleamed with intelligence. But Ruskin was far more impressed by his surroundings than by the celebrity of his host. He could not keep his eyes from wandering round the room; from staring at the portfolios of old masters which lay negligently on the tables; at an antique head used as a paper-weight: at an antique foot serving, when necessary, to keep open the door.

When at last he spoke, it was with the wholly innocent ingenuousness that was later to make him so many enemies. To use his own words, he "congratulated him with enthusiasm on the beauty of the engravings by which his poems were illustrated—but betrayed, I fear me, at the same time some lack of an equally vivid interest in the composition of the poems themselves".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it appeared on Mr. Pringle's unadvised cross-examination of him in the presence that he knew more of the vignettes than the verses. This was scarcely congenial to the man from whom princes had solicited invitations, and who, if a stranger arrived who seemed unaware of his position, had been known to remark abruptly to the servant: "Thomas, bring down that volume of my celebrated poems". No wonder that the polite and persevering Pringle, given an occasional honourable mention in the life of Scott, suddenly "diverted the conversation to subjects connected with Africa".<sup>2</sup> But even then Ruskin would not take the hint, or make suitable contributions to a subject "more calculated to interest the polished minstrel of St. James' Square".<sup>3</sup> His eyes continued to wander to the pictures "glowing from the crimson-silken walls", and the talk flowed about him all unconscious. After a decent interval, Pringle rose to take leave, and Ruskin discreetly followed his example. They were ushered down the handsome staircase in a solemn hush. But once out in the street, the well-bred Pringle took the opportunity of advising the embryo Byron that in future, when

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.



he was in the company of distinguished men, it would profit him better if he listened more attentively to their conversation.

## 2

It was doubtless because Ruskin's youth was so isolated that when he fell in love, he loved not only with the ardour of a deeply sensitive and romantic nature, but also with all the passionate intensity of a vivid imagination. Though the place that Charles Richardson had left vacant in his heart was not soon taken by any figure of flesh and blood who reciprocated his affection, it was nevertheless presently occupied by an idol sadly difficult to displace.

As may be expected from the circumscribed nature of his life, the young girl of whom Ruskin presently found himself enamoured was a maiden of the sherry trade. During the tour of 1833, when the Ruskins had stayed for a few days in Paris, it was inevitable that they should visit Mr. Domecq, who was then established in a handsome mansion in the Champs Elysées. Half Spanish and half French, Domecq had married an Englishwoman, so that their home had an unusual atmosphere of cosmopolitan gaiety; particularly as it chanced that all his five daughters were then home from school. The eldest daughter, Diana, was shortly to be married to Comte de Maison, an officer in the Napoleonic army, and the house consequently rang with innocent, delightful girlish laughter. There was a friendly dinner, at which the grown-ups talked of the sad death of Bellini, after which the four younger girls dutifully made an effort to entertain the fair-haired, blue-eyed and rather delicate-looking young visitor from England. But this was less easy than might have been expected. With their mother and a pleasant old French gentleman they started to play a game called "*la toilette de Madame*"; but, unused to such frivolities, Ruskin kept forgetting whether he was the necklace or the garters, and presently the game had to be abandoned on this account. Then two of the girls, Clothilde and Cécile, began to play some dance music, but Ruskin, who had never learned to dance, could only watch them with a spellbound stare of admiration. Since it seemed they could evoke from this stiff and solemn foreigner not a spark of gaiety, not a shadow of response, the elder girls soon abandoned their ineffective efforts to amuse and entertain him, and danced together while he watched them from a sofa in solitary splendour. To add to the difficulty, Ruskin could understand very little French, and it never seems to have occurred to his spirited and gracious hostesses to speak to him in English. Thus, isolated and unamused, he sat there, trying to put the best face on it he could, until the youngest girl, a child of nine and probably instructed by her mother, took pity upon his desolation and, seating herself beside him, began to prattle away continuously, charitably leaving no pause for the replies that he could

not make. In one incessant flow, she told him all her intimate joys and sorrows, "the objectionable characters of her teachers, and of the delightful characters of her companions, and of the mischief she got into, and the surreptitious enjoyments they devised, and the joys of coming back to the Champs Elysées and the general likeness of Paris to the Garden of Eden".<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, watching Clothilde-Adèle, decided that he had better do his best to learn to speak French.

Three years later, early in 1836, Mr. Domecq, deciding to visit England in order to pay a round of complimentary visits to his English buyers, suggested to his partner that he should leave his daughters conveniently disposed for seeing the sights of London at Mr. Ruskin's house. Probably, when he made the suggestion, it had not occurred to him that Mr. Ruskin's house might be a far humbler place of entertainment than his own, and ill equipped for the sudden, unexpected harbouring of four fashionable young girls straight from Paris. Mrs. Ruskin, dutiful but faintly disapproving, displayed her usual housewifely efficiency, however, and by dint of a sudden re-organisation managed to get the four alien young maidens in somehow. Thus did this "most curious galaxy, or southern cross, of unconceived stars"<sup>2</sup> float on a sudden into Ruskin's obscure firmament of London suburb.

Three years had not only made a great difference in the development of Ruskin. It had also made a great difference in the appearance and the manners of the four young Mlles. Domecq. Convent-bred at Cadiz, civilised and dressed in Paris, they now, in addition to their two native tongues, spoke English with a charming foreign intonation and, in addition to good sound commonsense, each possessed for him a singular and idiosyncratic charm. Elise was still the amiable and inconsequent creature who, in Paris, had prattled to him artlessly of all her own affairs. Caroline was staid, practical. Cécile was self-composed. But Clothilde—or Adèle, as he preferred to call her, was now become for him a creature haloed with a mysterious and an extravagant beauty. In her he saw the consummation of all poetic rhapsody: in her he saw the Fairy Parilanou in order to win whose hand he must find Prince Ahmed's arrow. Clothilde-Adèle seems to have been a commonplace, pretty girl, well educated and well bred, who possessed a lively charm and knew how to wear her clothes. She had luxuriant hair, naturally red lips, and was now in the last budding of unconscious maidenhood. To young John, who had met but few girls in his life, and none with all the alluring ways of France and Spain, "she walked in beauty like the night". He was overcome with speechless admiration. Looking back after more than half a century, he could well be tenderly ironic. But he was certainly not capable of irony or detachment at the time. The "heap of white ashes" to which she reduced him in four days, and the "Mercredi des cendres" which

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 178.

lasted four years were his first deep experience, intense and passionate;<sup>1</sup> his first awakening to the world of intensified beauty which is sometimes miraculously quickened by early love.

Adèle was but fifteen, with a graceful figure and a charming oval-shaped face, less beautiful, possibly, than some of her sisters. But at seventeen Ruskin knew with instantaneous certainty that she was the girl he would like to be his wife. And with his utmost powers he did his best to win her. But his manner, alas, was "a curious combination of Mr. Traddles, Mr. Torts and Mr. Winkle",<sup>2</sup> and his fervour and his longing were tempered with an unconscious vanity that turned his most arduous efforts into comedy.

The better to express his feelings, he turned to verse, and composed some stanzas on *Adèle by Moonlight*:

"With what a glory and a grace  
The moonbeam lights her laughing face,  
And dances in her dazzling eye;  
As liquid in its brilliancy  
As the deep blue of midnight ocean,  
When underneath, with trembling motion,  
The phosphor light floats by!  
And blushes bright pass o'er her cheek,  
But pure and pale as is the glow  
Of sunset on a mountain peak  
Robed in eternal snow;  
Her ruby lips half-oped the while,  
With careless air around her throwing  
Or, with a vivid glance bestowing  
A burning word, or silver smile."<sup>3</sup>

Unhappily Adèle was singularly unimpressed with the effort; not because she did not think the verses good: but rather because she thought it was very curious for a young man who was her father's partner's son to be writing verses at all. None of the young gentlemen she knew in Paris did it. Or perhaps Ruskin was too timid to show her his verses after all. Anyhow, he was certainly not too shy to try to impress her with elevating conversation. When in company, he "sate jealously miserable like a stock fish (in truth, I imagine, looking like nothing so much as a skate in an aquarium trying to get up the glass)",<sup>4</sup> but when they were alone, he seized every opportunity to explain to her with laborious pains his own views "upon the subjects of the Spanish Armada, the Battle of Waterloo, and the doctrine of Transubstantiation".<sup>5</sup>

Certainly Clothilde-Adèle was not amused. She was amused, how-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

ever, when she read *Leoni, a Legend of Italy*, a work designed to convince her of his literary prowess, which was shortly afterwards printed in *Friendship's Offering*. But the work, alas, had not been designed to amuse her in this particular way. She had been intended to read with breathless interest the wild exploits of the bandit, and of the maiden Giulietta, and instead, she "laughed over it in rippling ecstasies of derision".<sup>1</sup> Which only increased her young lover's acute sense of anguished impotence.

When Adèle left Herne Hill with her sisters, Ruskin was desolate. He wrote more poems to her, which he dared not send her (they were later published in *Friendship's Offering*) and sent her a long and urgent letter, to which she did not reply, though one of her sisters politely and pityingly wrote to say that his incompetent effort had much amused her. Then, hoping to produce an immortal work which could not fail to arouse her love when laid with knightly admiration at her feet, he sat under the mulberry tree in the garden to write in blank verse a stirring drama in the Elizabethan manner. When he found he could not even finish it, he wrote more verse to her.

"She lays her down in beauty's light,—  
Oh, peaceful may her slumbers be!  
She cannot hear my breathed 'Good Night',  
I cannot send it o'er the sea;  
And though my thoughts be fleet and free  
To fly to her with speed excelling,  
They cannot speak, she cannot see—  
Those constant thoughts around her dwelling. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

This suddenly aroused depth of feeling had compensations despite its pain. It gave him, above all, "a true and glorious sense of the newly revealed miracle of human love, in its exaltation of the physical beauty of the world he had till then sought by its own light alone".<sup>3</sup> But with the complete lack of all companionship (save the placid and entirely negligible Mary, who never seemed to count in the Ruskin household) it plunged him into a prolonged mood of melancholy desolation that persisted intermittently even when he was surrounded with new impressions and new interests.

This melancholy was perfectly observable to his parents, though it does not seem to have disturbed them unduly. Indeed, they seem to have behaved in the whole affair with a singular folly and complacency. Mrs. Ruskin, who could not help but realise her son's distress, would never have consented to his marriage with a Roman Catholic (a prospect then as alarming to an English Evangelical as would to-day be marriage with a Negress) and was doubtless comfortably reassured

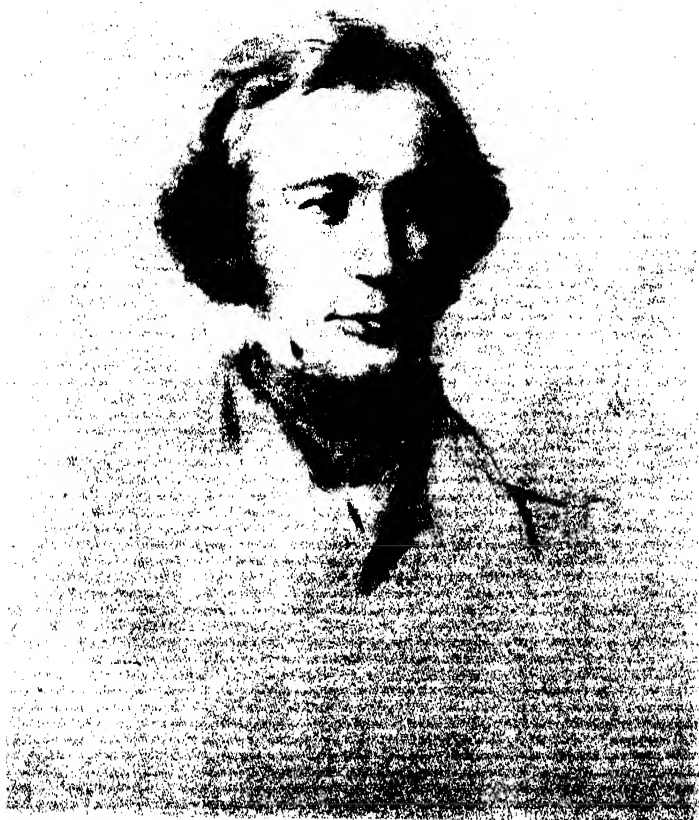
<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 181.

by the fact that whatever John may have felt for Adèle, it was evident to the most impervious that Adèle cared nothing for him. John James, on the other hand, and, it seems, his partner too, would, for business reasons, have been perfectly willing to countenance the match had there been any likelihood of eventual reciprocity. As it was, he was pleased that his son had become acquainted with some agreeable and well-bred girls, and was even more pleased that this acquaintance had result in his writing verses which had a spark of feeling in them, and might even possibly prove to be the equal of *Hours of Idleness*.

But being fully acquainted with the situation, neither of them can be wholly exonerated from the wanton folly of inviting Adèle for a second visit, long before their son's passion had abated.



III. HENRY AGLAND

*Crayon by George Richmond, R.A., 1846*

IV. JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER

*Sketch in water-colour by John Phillip, 1850*

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## Book II

### The Sun is God 1837-1847

*In a general way, remember it is a far better thing to find out other great men, than to become one yourself: for you can become one at best, but you may bring others to light in numbers.*

RUSKIN, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 4.

*I was first driven into literature that I might defend the fame of Turner, since that day I have been explaining the power, or proclaiming the praise, of Tintoret,—of Luini,—of Carpaccio,—of Botticelli,—of Carlyle; never thinking for an instant of myself: and sacrificing what little faculty, and large pleasure, I had in painting, either from nature or noble art, that, if possible, I might bring others to see what I rejoiced in, and understand what I had deciphered. There has been no heroism in this, nor virtue;—but only, as far as I am myself concerned, quaint ordering of Fate; but the result is, that I have at last obtained an instinct of impartial and reverent judgment, which sternly fits me for this final work, to which, if to anything, I was appointed.*

RUSKIN: *Fors Clavigera*.

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## Chapter I

1. *Accession of Queen Victoria: discontent among the masses: life at Oxford: aristocratic companions: presence of his mother: the offending essay.* 2. *Motions at the Union: work and recreation: praise of his drawings: the eccentric Dr. Buckland: Dr. Daubeny and Mr. Darwin.* 3. *W. L. Harrison: attempts at the Newdigate: applause in the Sheldonian.* 4. *"Juvenilia": the essays of Kataphusin: "The Poetry of Architecture."* 5. *College friendships: Walter Brown and Osborne Gordon: Newton, Clayton and Acland: Charlotte Withers: reappearance of Adèle: Miss Wardell: farewell to Adèle.*

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W HILE the young Ruskin was suffering, not without a certain element of self-dramatisation, all the ecstasies and pains of early, unrequited love, great events were taking place in the public world.



"The King died at twenty minutes after two yesterday morning," Greville recorded on 21 June, 1837,<sup>1</sup> "and the young Queen met the Council at Kensington Palace at eleven. Never was anything like the first impression she produced, or the chorus of praise and admiration which is raised about her manner and behaviour, and certainly not without justice. . . .

" . . . At twelve she held a council, at which she presided with as much ease as if she had been doing nothing else all her life. . . . She looked very well, and though so small in stature, and without much pretension to beauty, the gracefulness of her manner and the good expression of her countenance give her on the whole a very agreeable appearance, and with her youth inspire an excessive interest in all who approach her. . . .<sup>2</sup> I remember when George IVth died, seven years ago," he continued a few days later, "having been struck by the small apparent sensation that his death created. There was, however, at that time a great deal of bustle and considerable excitement, which were caused by the activity of the new Court, and the eccentricities of the King, but in the present instance the Crown has been transferred to the new Queen with a tranquillity which is curious and edifying."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, below the apparent serenity of the political scene, the careful observer could not help but detect ominous stirrings. " . . . The year opens in no small gloom and uncertainty," the same genial and vigilant recorder noted but eighteen months later. "On the surface all is bright and smooth, the country is powerful, peaceful, and prosperous, and all the elements of wealth and power are increasing; but the mind of the mass is disturbed and discontented, and there is a continual fermentation going on, and separate and unconnected causes of agitation are in incessant operation, which create great alarm, but which there seems to exist no power of checking or subduing. . . . The accounts of the Chartists (as they are called), at and about Manchester, represent them to be collected in vast bodies, associations of prodigious numbers, meeting in all the public-houses, collecting arms universally, and constantly practicing by firing at a mark, openly threatening, if their demands are not complied with, to enforce them by violence. . . ."

But Ruskin, the most carefully cosseted of youths, was still as oblivious to the wider issues of life as when he had been a child. He had gone to Oxford to matriculate at the end of October 1836, but owing to the somewhat erratic nature of his previous education, he had found the examinations more difficult than would have any conventionally educated youth of his intelligence and attainments. But he had managed to scrape through, and the following January his university life at Oxford had begun.

<sup>1</sup> *Greville Memoirs* (ed. Reeve), 21.6.1837, vol. ii, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* (25.6.1837), vol. ii, p. 17.

Ruskin's life at Oxford, like so many other features of his remarkable career, was strange almost to the point of fantasy. To begin with, John James, increasingly prosperous in the sherry trade, naturally desirous of doing the best that he could for his beloved son, and no longer shying with horror at the thought of possibly usurping the aristocratic privileges of the day, had entered his son as a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, a distinction usually reserved only for the titled or the landed gentry. Indeed, Ruskin wrote later, "his ideal of my future—now entirely formed in conviction of my genius—was that I should enter at college into the best society, take all the prizes every year, and a double first to finish with; marry Lady Clara Vere de Vere; write poetry as good as Byron's, only pious; preach sermons as good as Bossuet's only Protestant, be made, at forty, Bishop of Winchester, and at fifty, Primate of England".<sup>1</sup> This ambitious idea had, at first, caused him some hesitation, and he had consulted the Dean as to whether such a course would be quite becoming. But the Dean had merely gruffly remarked that it was open to anyone to become a gentleman commoner of Christ Church so long as he could pay the fees: and it seemed unlikely that, on his slender attainments, Ruskin had any likelihood of entering the university in any other way. So John James soon had the joy of seeing his son in a silken gown and with a golden tassel in his velvet cap.

In 1837 England was not the comparatively democratic country, nor Oxford the comparatively democratic institution that each is to-day. Class distinctions at the universities were carefully observed, and undergraduates were divided into various categories—students, gentleman commoners, commoners and servitors—distinguished not only by their seats at table and the appointment of their rooms, but even more by the difference in grandeur of their respective caps and gowns. Although at this date there was already a large increase in the ranks of the prosperous middle classes, it was quite exceptional for the sons of tradesmen, however successful, and even for the sons of wealthy manufacturers, to mix on equal terms with the nobility and gentry. So that Ruskin was amongst the first of the middle class sons of rich fathers to sport a silken robe and a golden tassel to his cap.

Francis Charteris, the future Lord Wemyss; Lord March, the future Duke of Richmond; Stephen Fox-Strangways, the future Lord Stavordale; Charles Cocks, the future Earl Somers; de Gonkel, the future Earl of Athlone; Lord Desart, Lord Emlyn, Lord Kildare, and Lord Carew—these were his new companions at dinners in college, all young men eminently able "to buy with sums equivalent to their dignity the privileges alike of rejecting their college's instruction and control". Hardly surprising that at the "gentleman commoners' table, in Cardinal Wolsey's dining-room", Ruskin, with his fastidiously simple and innocent tastes, was, in "all sorts of ways at once less than

<sup>1</sup> *Prætoriana: Works*, vol. 35, p. 185.

himself, and in all sorts of ways at once, out of his place".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he managed to console himself with that appreciation for patrician beauty which made him see in the delicate good looks of Charteris "the grandest type of European Circassian race hitherto visible to him"; and in the proud demeanour of Lord Desart "a young man of superb personal beauty and noble gifts of mind".<sup>2</sup>

Apart from any social implications, Christ Church was a bad choice to have made for a youth of Ruskin's capacities and attainments; since the scholastic supremacy it had enjoyed, chiefly owing to its ancient prestige and its open scholarships until 1830, was being fast eclipsed by Balliol, which had already attained the scholastic distinction that it was never afterwards to lose. Between 1831 and 1841, indeed, Balliol produced all the most brilliant men, which included, in the single decade, two archbishops of Canterbury, two Lords Chief Justice, two Cabinet ministers, two poets (Clough and Arnold) and many famous scholars. But with such men as Clough, Matthew Arnold, Stanley and Jowett, all his contemporaries, Ruskin made no acquaintance.

But this was all nothing in comparison with the fact that Margaret Ruskin not only accompanied her son to Oxford, but lived there during term throughout the entire period of his university life, and—although she refrained from appearing with him in public—required him to be present for tea without exception every evening. Mr. Ruskin, unable to leave his business during the week, slept at Denmark Hill and came down to Oxford for week-ends. The reason for this egregious arrangement is said to have been Margaret Ruskin's realisation of her son's delicate health. Nevertheless, it was the worst thing that could have happened to young John. Already too dependent on his parents, his one chance of overcoming the grave disadvantages of his circumscribed boyhood would have been to have had the usual freedom now; and although his immediate embarrassment was confined to being seen with his parents by his acquaintances when he paid visits to the print-shop, and his fellows seem to have ragged him far less on this account than might have been expected, it was this act of self-indulgent wilfulness on the part of his well-intentioned, complacent, self-righteous and utterly uncomprehending mother that created the unconquerable acquiescence to parental domination that was to distort the whole of his future life. Nor was John James any more sensible in his infatuated devotion to this gifted son. While permitting him to spend what he liked, and paying all his bills, just as when John had been a child and vexed him by spending his pocket money on some mineralogical specimen of which he could not see the value, so now he would never permit him to use his own judgment in making any extensive purchases; with the result that when he should

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208.

have been learning practically the value of money by making his own mistakes, the youthful Ruskin never did.

It was thus encumbered that Ruskin settled in his little back room, and, vaguely disappointed that he had no oriel window to look out of, and that the smooth-gravelled square of Peckwater was so unalluring, dutifully resolved to earn academic distinctions to gratify his parents. The first few days at a university are usually difficult enough even for boys with a successful career at a distinguished public school behind them. To the sensitive and ingenuous Ruskin, how much more so. In the charming resignation of old age which characterises *Praeterita*, he remembered being received as a "good-humoured and inoffensive little cur, contemptuously, yet kindly, among the dogs of race at the gentleman commoners' table".<sup>1</sup>

As was only to be expected, Ruskin naively did his best to live up to so much unaccustomed and conspicuous grandeur. When Mr. Domecq's eldest daughter, now married to her soldier count, paid a visit to England, and came to see him for old acquaintance' sake, he could not repress the temptation to tell his neighbours at table that she was the Comtesse de Maison, thus earning their merciless gibes for several weeks. There were other innocent transgressions which aroused general abuse. Chief amongst these was his lowering the prestige of all self-respecting gentleman commoners by reading a prize essay in hall. As a dutiful scholar and an embryo writer Ruskin took particular pains with the writing of his essays; and one day produced an essay stamped with such singular signs of talent that he was assigned by his tutor the honour of reciting it aloud one Saturday afternoon, to a compulsory audience of his fellows. Now it was the convention for gentleman commoners to eschew all work. Some of them even paid students less fortunate than themselves to produce inescapable tasks at a few shillings a page. For one of their number to flaunt himself thus wantonly was a solecism of the most outrageous kind. Ruskin was savagely attacked afterwards, threatened with Coventry: and a bonfire was lighted in Peckwater, during which Ruskin managed to escape unmolested to bed, to consign the offending essay to perdition.

However, there was a certain disarming charm and candour in his manner that seems to have saved him from the really damaging treatment that a spirited and sensitive youth might easily have suffered under such conditions. Fortunately, owing to the family trade and his precocious experience in imbibing sherry, at least he could hold his liquor like a gentleman.

But it was not to be expected, at a period in which a learned divine of Balliol was nearly killed by a bottle flung by a sodden undergraduate through his windows, that an odd fish who sketched, wrote poetry, played no violent games and visited his mother daily for tea, should

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 195.

avoid successfully the undesirable attentions of the rowdy. There were those who amused themselves by riding the "good-natured, inoffensive little cur" round Tom Quad like a donkey. Others diverted themselves by trying to make the milksop drunk. On one famous occasion, it is said that a party stormed his rooms and, in an orgy of destruction, demolished much of the furniture; which done, they rushed into the bedroom where Ruskin awaited them with a disarming smile. "Gentlemen, I am sorry I cannot now entertain you as you wish," he said, "but my father, who is engaged in the sherry trade, has put it in my power to invite you all to wine tomorrow evening. Will you come?"<sup>1</sup> The rioters (so said the grave *Times* in its obituary notice) withdrew with appreciative cheers.

Ruskin was soon going his own way with a characteristic diligence with which nothing and no one could interfere. "An odd sort of man who would never do anything"<sup>2</sup> was the general verdict of the eccentric and adaptable youth who could sit in a public house with a horsey acquaintance, to watch him, by a revealing series of winks and nods, "elucidate from the landlord some points of the horses entered for the Derby", and yet still followed such odd preoccupations as the composition of poems, the drawing of delicate sketches, and the energetic study of geology.<sup>3</sup>

The Oxford of the thirties was still very largely isolated from the intellectual world outside. Not Bright and Cobden stirred its interest or aroused its ardour, but Newman and Pusey. The Oxford Movement was at the full vigour of its flood, and it was quite an ordinary occurrence when a zealous young Newmanite, whose conversation seemed concerned with nothing but the subject of baptismal regeneration, was plucked for his Littlego, to hear Newman solemnly pronounce that he must go twice round Christ Church Meadow on his knees repeating the *As in Praesenti*. For a youth still destined for the career of an Evangelical clergyman, Mrs. Ruskin considered these influences dangerous in the extreme. Thanking God with pious complacency that she had his word to go to, she bade her son "take nothing for granted that you hear from these people, but think and search for yourself."<sup>4</sup>

But Pusey was to young Ruskin no more than a "sickly and rather ill put together English clerical gentleman who never looked one in the face or appeared aware of the state of the weather",<sup>5</sup> and all religious speculation and discussion passed him by. His mind was so keenly sensitive, and his heart so poignantly responsive, to the miraculous beauty of the natural world, that during his early youth and manhood he accepted all the tenets of his sectarian faith without

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. lxii.

<sup>3</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 12.6.1843: *Works*, vol. 36, p. xxii.

<sup>5</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 202.

a qualm of doubt, if only because he was aware that mystery encircled the whole of life, and that if reason could not probe the unknown secrets of a natural fact, it certainly could not hope to understand completely the complexities of theology. When he felt himself in a right relationship to the external world, feelings of wonder, gratitude and veneration were constantly aroused in him by the beauties of a flower, a shell or a bit of glittering spar, so that astonishment and delight produced an exaltation that he took for an aspect of the divine presence, even when in practice it bored him excessively, instead of obeying angels like Abraham, or being an apostle during the time of Christ, to have to go to chapel on Sundays and forego all agreeable diversion.

## 2

Nevertheless in a short time Ruskin discreetly made his presence felt; and his tall slender figure, with its tight trousers strapped under the instep, the brown frock coat with the velvet collar, the blue neck-cloth (that he was to affect all his life), and, on grand occasions, a white satin waistcoat embroidered with gold sprigs, worn beneath a high dress coat with gilt buttons, was soon to become familiar not only at the most exclusive of Christ Church societies, but at the Union, where men were astonished at the torrents of eloquence that poured from his lips, as he described the extraordinary beauty of sunsets in the Alps. He served for a term on the committee; and the motions that he proposed, supported, and opposed, are already indicative of the formation of opinions that were to strengthen and crystallize throughout his life. Of the former were the arguments that "intellectual education as distinguished from moral discipline is detrimental to the interests of the lower orders of a nation: that the reading of good and well written novels is neither prejudicial to the moral nor the intellectual character",<sup>1</sup> and that "theatrical representations are upon the whole highly beneficial to the character of a nation", upon which occasion he is said to have made "a very ingenious and somewhat sarcastic speech which excited much laughter in the room".<sup>2</sup> Of the latter was the axiom that was later to become a savage indictment, that "the present facilities of acquiring knowledge through the medium of the press are on the whole productive of more harm than benefit".<sup>3</sup>

At first in his little room which looked out upon the Palladian Library, later in Tom Quad, and, finally, in lodgings in St. Aldate's, he led the life of an industrious student of multiple and compelling interests. His daily routine scarcely ever varied. He would usually

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxxv.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, *l.c.*

read for an hour before chapel, which he never missed; attend lectures all morning, and another one after lunch; take a long walk; dine in Hall, growing eloquent over his wine; and then run over to the High Street to have tea with his mother, only leaving her in time to get in when Tom rang, and give himself another hour's reading until ten.

Between meetings of the Union and the musical society, where he learned to sing Florentine canzonets and to accompany with befitting bravura sentimental songs of Bellini, he nevertheless applied himself to the classics with exemplary zeal; and his opinions of the authors he studied were as characteristic and as trenchant as his arguments in debate. Tacitus was too difficult; Terence dull and stupid beyond patience; Lucretius was hated with a bitterly wholesome detestation; Juvenal was the worst and ugliest poet that could have been put in his hands; he could not translate a line of Homer, found Sophocles "dismal and in subject disgusting";<sup>1</sup> but delighted in Aristophanes, Hesiod and Pindar, got well settled down to the history of Herodotus, and knew "every syllable of Thucydides, whose theme, the suicide of Greece, was felt by me with a sympathy in which the best powers of my heart and brain were brought up to their fullest".<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, he passed successfully his Smalls in March 1838, and wrote jubilantly to inform his father: "I was very cool when I got into it; found the degree of excitement agreeable; nibbled the end of my pen, and grinned at Kynaston (one of the examiners) over the table as if I had been going to pluck him."<sup>3</sup> But he had only "scraped through, and no more, with his Latin", though he came "creditably off with what else had to be done, even if the Littlego had asked, and got out of him, pretty nearly all he had in him, or was ever likely to have in him in that kind".<sup>4</sup>

His great interests were still those of his boyhood, and were to remain dearest to him for his whole life. He sketched diligently; and one of his fellows coming back late from a party looked over his shoulder one evening as he was working on a water-colour in the manner of Prout by the central basin in Tom Quad, to be charmed and astonished by the delicacy of his brush. The Dean came to hear of his gifts, requested to be shown some of his work, and professed to be highly delighted. H. G. Liddell, then one of the most popular tutors of Christ Church, a man of engaging charm and magnificent appearance—"the rarest type of nobly presenced Englishman"<sup>5</sup>—wrote in 1837 to a friend that he was going to "drink tea with Adolphus Liddell . . . and see the drawings of a very wonderful gentleman commoner here who draws wonderfully. He is a very

<sup>1</sup> *Dilecta: Works*, vol. 35, p. 610.

<sup>2</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of March, 1838; *Works*, vol. 36, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 203-4.

strange fellow, always dressing in a great coat with a brown velvet collar, and a large neckcloth tied over his mouth, and living in quite his own way among the odd set of hunting and sporting men that gentlemen commoners usually are".<sup>1</sup> And having examined Ruskin's work with an appreciation based upon taste and knowledge, presently voted them to be the best sketches he had ever seen.

There were frequent trips to Blenheim, "a beautiful but melancholy place, fast going to decay from the neglect of its ruined owner", as F. W. Robertson, a contemporary of Ruskin, wrote to a friend, to look at the *Ansdei Madonna*: "a most pure and instructive Raffaele of his early time", Ruskin declared, "painted at Perugia—I don't think there is another such in England",<sup>2</sup> or afternoons spent drawing a Norman door with much difficulty to the instructions of his friend Newton who was given to the scientific study of architecture and archaeology, and proposed to read a paper shortly to the Architectural Society.

Then there were lectures in geology, said to charm his listeners by their combined wit, learning and imagination, by the celebrated Dr. Buckland, a Canon of the Cathedral who combined benevolent Christianity with an unparalleled scientific curiosity. "It would seem," said a sceptical Scotsman at one of Dr. Buckland's lectures in the North, "that your animals always walked in one direction." "Certainly," was the immediate reply. "Cheirotherium was a Scotsman, and always travelled south."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Buckland's house in the corner of Tom Quad, with its grinning monsters on the low staircase, its side-tables covered with specimens of fossils protected with cards brusquely inscribed "PAWS OFF"; its dining-room sideboard laden with exotic dishes of horse flesh or crocodile; and its brilliant dinner at which, besides the guests, all sorts of curious animals freely invaded the room, was a recognised meeting place for the ablest scientific minds of the day. At Dr. Buckland's Ruskin met both Dr. Daubeny, "one of the most celebrated geologists of the day"—as he told his father—"a curious little animal looking through his spectacles with an air very distingué",<sup>4</sup> and Mr. Darwin, whom he had heard read a paper at the Geological Society, and whom he buttonholed in conversation the whole evening: adequate compensation, one must hope, for his missing at dinner "a delicate toast of mice".<sup>5</sup>

## 3

But the most persistent and vigorous energy of which Ruskin was capable was for nearly three years devoted to the writing of poems.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, pp. lxii-lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 495.

<sup>3</sup> W. Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of Oxford*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 22.4.1837: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 205.



In this he was doubtless stimulated by having an editor eager to print everything that he produced. The truthful and instructive Thomas Pringle had now given place, on *Friendship's Offering*, to W. L. Harrison, who had a far more agreeable opinion of the young John Ruskin, and encouraged John James to assure his son in believing that he was the one serious rival to the rising Tennyson. W. L. Harrison, indeed, was to be Ruskin's literary adviser for many years. "Without Mr. Harrison's ready praise and severe punctuation," he wrote later in *My First Editor*, "I should either have tired of my labour or lost it."<sup>1</sup> Firmly convinced of his poetic powers, it was inevitable that he should aspire to win the Newdigate Prize. His chosen confidants seemed to have been ready with advice for his success, and gave him (as he told his father) directions which were very excellent for writing bad poetry. "One was to imitate Pope. Now when I write poetry (vain illusion) I like to imitate nobody. However, one piece of counsel was excellent, viz., to write two poems, one in my own style, the other polished and spoiled up to their standard, so that if I fail to carry all before me with my own, I might be able to fall back upon the other."<sup>2</sup>

With J. H. Dart, who had been at Dale's, though his senior there and consequently unknown, and who was also an aspirant for the prize, Ruskin would spend many enthusiastic evenings reading his attempts, listening attentively to his rival's, and offering and receiving practical advice. For three years (1837-9), he diligently sent in his laboured efforts. The first of these—*The Gypsies* (why Ruskin should have been drawn to such a theme it is as impossible to guess as it is to explain the macabre and sinister *Scythian Guest*)—was unsuccessful; as was the second, *The Exile of St. Helena*. But, spurred on by ambition—"I must give an immense time every day to the Newdigate which I must have, if study will get it,"<sup>3</sup> he told his father—his third attempt, *Salsette and Elephanta*—an embarrassingly competent and unnecessary poem—won him the coveted honour, even though the professor of poetry did ask him "to cut out all his best bits".<sup>4</sup>

This triumph was suitably celebrated both by Ruskin and John James, and at the end of the term the young poet was cheerfully reporting to his father the compliments paid him by the college censor, in his end of term speech, when he referred so gratifyingly to a certain "insignis juvenis—ex superiori ordine . . . uniting an intense degree of intellect and morality; who, having acquired extensive knowledge of men and natural phenomena during protracted travel—uniting refined taste with extensive knowledge of polite literature . . . had been successful in certamine poetico—victoriam meritam, etc., to

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 24.12.1836: *Works*, vol. 2, p. xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Oct. 1838: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Præterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 422.

the great joy of his college friends and tutors. 'Then he proceeded to compare this juvenis to Alexander the Great and Pompey, though I couldn't catch the point of the resemblance'. After which, as was not unusual, the triumphant son expressed in no uncertain terms his desire for some material reward, and declared that he wanted "a brown, rough, bright eyed brute of a new dog".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the distinction of an unusual popular acclaim was to be conferred upon him; for on the day that he recited his poem at Commemoration, it happened that both Herschel and Wordsworth were to receive honorary degrees; and an audience of over two thousand had gathered particularly in order to demonstrate their appreciation. The outburst of enthusiasm which greeted Wordsworth in the Sheldonian Theatre, Wordsworth's biographer Knight wrote later, "has been referred to by many as almost unexampled". And such was the excitement that huge applause greeted also the slender young winner of the Newdigate.

## 4

The winning of the Newdigate Prize and the appearance of his other poems in *Friendship's Offering* were not Ruskin's only literary triumphs during his college years. As "J.R." of Christ Church, he contributed pretty little lyrics to the other famous annuals of the day, the *Amaranth* edited by T. K. Hervey, and the *Book of Beauty* and *The Keepsake* edited by Lady Blessington: "gorgeous inanities", as Greville called them, "to get up which all the fashion and beauty, the taste and talent of London are laid under contribution".<sup>2</sup> More important, he was steadily composing essays in the polished prose which, if more laborious, was at least a far more natural means of expression to him than verse had proved; and here again he was so singularly fortunate as to find an editor who not only encouraged, but gladly published, everything he wrote. I. C. Loudon, Ruskin's "first literary patron",<sup>3</sup> the son of a Scottish farmer and an original, self-educated, enterprising man, at one time had as many as five monthly magazines appearing simultaneously, to say nothing of sundry encyclopaedias, and had the courage to lose over £10,000 in his enthusiasm for letters. This enthusiasm included a fervent admiration of the works of the young Ruskin who, he wrote to the highly gratified John James, "is certainly the greatest natural genius that ever it has been my fortune to become acquainted with, and I cannot but feel proud to think that at some future period, when both you and I are under the turf, it will be stated in the literary history of your son's life that the first article of his which was published was in

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Greville Memoirs*, ed. Reeve (17.2.1839), vol. i, p. 537.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 21, p. 243 n.

*Loudon's Magazine of Natural History*".<sup>1</sup> Thus, in Loudon's *Architectural and Natural History Magazines* and kindred publications, Ruskin had for his essays a ready outlet that stimulated him to apply himself to the writing of prose as earnestly as he applied himself to the writing of verse.

Under the pseudonym of Kataphusin, "chosen because 'According to Nature' was expressive of the manner of his discourse",<sup>2</sup> and he already found in himself a power of judgment that might have seemed to others unbecoming when donned by a sprig of eighteen, there appeared in some of the most intelligent magazines of the day the series of papers, grandiloquent in title but sound in argument and sonorous in style, entitled *The Poetry of Architecture*, which were to be the precursor to *Modern Painters*.

*Introduction to the Poetry of Architecture: or The Architecture of the Nations of Europe considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character* is an unusually accomplished and mature work for an undergraduate not yet twenty years of age. With varied recollections of foreign travel in his mind, and precise knowledge of the atmospheric conditions and geological formation of the different places of which he wrote, he discussed, often with a soundness of judgment that could not be rivalled by a contemporary architect of enlightened views, the most suitable style of cottage and villa architecture in various parts of England, France, Switzerland and Italy. His remarks on chimneys, for example, could scarcely be improved upon even after the interval of over a century. Choosing, out of an elaborate array of a dozen and a half, the one most suitable for a Westmorland cottage, he remarks pertinently: "It is simple and substantial, without being cumbrous; it gives great variety to the wall from which it projects, terminates the roof agreeably, and dismisses its smoke with infinite propriety."<sup>3</sup>

Besides this native soundness of judgment already expressed in elegant and lucid prose, his trenchant humour admirably lampoons that chief enemy of the architect, the uneducated man of means with "original ideas". The passage is so delightfully illustrative of Ruskin's incisive sense of fun that it is well worth quoting as being the brilliantly echoed parrot cry of a universal type. "This, sir, is a slight note: I made it on the spot: approach to Villa Reale, near Pozzuoli. Dancing nymphs, you perceive, cypresses, shell fountain. I think I should like something like this for the approach: classical, you perceive, sir; elegant, graceful. Then, sir, this is a sketch, made by an American friend of mine: Whee-whaw-Kantamaraw's wigwam, King of the—Cannibal Islands, I think he said, sir; hog, you observe; scalps and boa constrictor skins: curious. Something like this, sir, would look neat,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 30.11.1837: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 630.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> *Poetry of Architecture: Works*, vol. 1, p. 58.

I think, for the front door; don't you? Then, the lower windows, I've not quite decided upon, but what would you say to Egyptian, sir? I think I should like my windows Egyptian, with hieroglyphics, sir, storks and coffins, and appropriate mouldings above: I brought some from Fountains Abbey the other day. Look here, sir; angels' heads putting their tongues out, rolled up in cabbage leaves, with a dragon on each side riding on a broomstick, and the devil looking on from the mouth of an alligator, sir. Odd, I think: interesting. Then the corners may be turned by octagonal towers, like the centre one in Kenilworth Castle, with Gothic doors, portcullis, and all, quite perfect, with cross slits for arrows, battlements for musketry, machicolations for boiling lead, and a room at the top for drying plums: and the conservatory at the bottom, sir, with Virginian creepers up the towers: door supported by sphinxes, holding scrapers in their forepaws, and having their tails prolonged into warm-water pipes, to keep the plants safe in winter, etc. The architect is, without doubt, a little astonished by these ideas and combinations, yet he sits calmly down to draw his elevations; as if he were a stone mason, or his employer an architect, and the fabric rises to electrify its beholders and confer immortality on its perpetrator."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's contributions to *Loudon's Magazine of Natural History* had begun, as we have seen, as early as 1834, with *Enquiries on the causes of the colour of the water of the Rhine*, and had been followed up with other papers upon geological subjects and scientific observations such as *On the causes which occasion the variation of temperature between spring and river water*. But now he applied his already developed gift of scientific observation to the laws governing artistic composition, and produced for the *Architectural Magazine* an elaborate and convincing series of notes upon the *Theory and Practice of Perspective*. There was also a paper upon *The Proper Shapes of Pictures and Engravings*, which curiously got itself into Repton's *Landscape Gardening*; and a discussion (again in the *Architectural Magazine*) upon *Whether works of art may, with propriety, be combined with the sublimity of nature; and what would be the most appropriate situation for the proposed monument to the memory of Sir Walter Scott*. His advice having been consulted upon the subject on account of some principles he had expressed in *The Poetry of Architecture*, Ruskin deduced from "demonstrable principles" that a colossal statue should be reared on Salisbury Crags; but the monument was finally erected in the form of a "small vulgar Gothic steeple".<sup>2</sup>

On *The Poetry of Architecture*, whose style was influenced by continual readings of Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler*, and which was already expressive of his characteristic method of "carelessly connected throwing out of thoughts as they came into his head, modulat-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Fers. Clavigera*, Letter 31: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 565.

ing the sentence in any time or rhythm that suited them, and only, when he began to lose breath, finishing it off with a neatly tied knot or melodious flourish", *The Times* was most complimentary. "The most remarkable contributor in the magazine, Kataphusin, has the mind of a poet as well as the eye and hand of an artist,"<sup>1</sup> was its enthusiastic comment. Which merely stimulated the young author to further effort.

## 5

Throughout the period of Oxford, there were, during the vacations, the usual diversions of the family tour. When they did not go abroad, John James took for his son chambers in St. James'; ostensibly in order that such blades of "The House" as were on visiting terms with him should not be inconvenienced by having to make the journey out to Camberwell; but really because he was reluctant for them to see the comparative modesty of their neat suburban home.

But Ruskin's relations with the "dogs of race", though cheerful enough, and responsible, later, for some of the most intimate contacts of his life, were never more than superficial: and, as the letters of these years show clearly enough, his few intimate friends were not of their number.

Two of the men who influenced Ruskin most deeply at this time were his private tutor, Osborne Gordon, and his College Tutor, Walter Brown. Osborne Gordon, Dean Kitchen wrote of him later, was a Shropshire student, "lean and haggard, with bright eyes, long reddish nose, untidy air, odd voice, and uncertain aspirates. He was one of our most brilliant Salopian scholars and students, of quaint wit, exquisite scholarly tastes, extraordinary mathematical gifts, and of a very kind heart." He was, moreover, "one of those wise, good-natured and brilliant men who realise so clearly the futility of ambition, that he would never enter into competition for high places or great emoluments; and was quite prepared to let the world go its own way, provided it equably allowed him to go his: which meant to study Greek with erudition and facility, and impart his learning graciously to the students in his charge".<sup>2</sup> Only when Ruskin failed dismally upon occasion to construe his Aristophanes, did he sometimes assume a slight air of "disapproving uncomfortableness". During the summer vacation of 1839, Osborne Gordon came to Herne Hill to give Ruskin special coaching: and they remained on such friendly terms throughout life, that it was Ruskin who eventually wrote his old tutor's epitaph; declaring him "an Englishman of the olden time, humane without weakness, learned without ostentation, witty without

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 2.2.1835.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Kitchen, *Ruskin in Oxford and Other Studies* (1904), p. 24.

malice, wise without pride; honest of heart, lofty of thought, dear to his fellow men, and dutiful to God".<sup>1</sup>

With Walter Brown, who beguiled him into "some small acquaintance with Greek verbs",<sup>2</sup> and whom, later, he declared to be "the only one of his old masters from whom he could receive guidance",<sup>3</sup> he was less intimate; though he sent him many interesting letters for several years.

Ruskin's most intimate undergraduate friends were all, as might have been expected, rather seriously inclined young men some few years older than himself: and the chief of these were Edward Clayton, Charles Newton, and Henry Acland. Clayton, an earnest young Churchman who took his degree in 1839 and was ordained two years later, was Ruskin's most faithful correspondent of the next few years; and, although their friendship does not seem to have survived their youth, received from him some of the most illuminating letters he ever wrote.

Charles Newton, the future archaeologist and diplomat, who was to discover the Tomb of Mausolus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was already a somewhat caustic, distinguished looking young man remarkable for his impassioned spirit of investigation, who early discovered that Ruskin had the "makings of a Robespierre" in him.<sup>4</sup> He later married the successful painter, Mary Severn, thus becoming a family connection of Ruskin's.

But it was Henry Acland who was eventually to become the oldest, and one of the most constant and devoted of lifelong friends. He was the younger son of that Sir Thomas Acland of Killerton in Devon, whom Gladstone had called "the finest gentleman in the West of England", and who had been on terms of friendship with such distinguished literary figures as Scott, Southey, Miss Edgeworth and Hannah More. Already to Henry Acland physiology "was an entrusted gospel of which he was the solitary and first preacher to the heathen",<sup>5</sup> and "in his undergraduate rooms in Canterbury he was designing the introduction of physiological study that was to make the university what she afterwards became".<sup>6</sup> Four years older than Ruskin, and two years his senior in college, "in the playful and proud heroism of his youth", Ruskin wrote later in *Praeterita*, "he gave me the good of seeing a noble young English life in its purity, sagacity, honour, reckless daring and happy piety, its English pride shining through all, like a girl's in her beauty. I had been too often adjured to take care of myself, ever to think of following him over slippery weirs, or accompanying him in a pilot's boat through white topped

<sup>1</sup> Epitaph in Easthampton Church, quoted *Works*, vol. 34, p. 647.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, pp. 200-1.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 31.1.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> *Praeterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 386.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

shoal water, but both in art and science he could pull me on, being years ahead of me, yet glad of my sympathy, for, till I came, he was literally alone in the university in caring for either".<sup>1</sup> Such was Ruskin's affection for Acland, indeed, that in *Readings in Modern Painters* he averred that "if it alone were all he owed to Oxford, the most gracious kindness of Alma Mater would in that gift have been fulfilled to him".<sup>2</sup>

During the vacations, too, there were continual emotional pre-occupations, for Adèle came twice to stay at Herne Hill, and, evidently in the hope of mitigating any pain that his still too ardent emotions might cause him, his parents deliberately put him in the way of meeting other eligible young girls. The first of these was Charlotte Withers, "a fragile, fair, freckled, sensitive slip of a girl about sixteen; graceful in an unfinished and small wild-flower sort of way, extremely intelligent, affectionate, wholly right-minded, and mild in piety. An altogether sweet and delicate creature of ordinary sort, not pretty, but quite pleasant to see, especially if her eyes were looking your way, and her mind with them".<sup>3</sup> The daughter of one of Mrs. Ruskin's few friends in the neighbourhood, a prosperous coal merchant, she seems to have been more impressed by young Ruskin's talents than the unappreciative Adèle. Ruskin's parents had intended Miss Withers as a salutary diversion from Adèle, but in a few days their susceptible son was paying her so much attention that they seem to have feared that their ruse had proved only too successful. The daughter of a coal merchant was no match for their brilliant son, and Miss Withers was discreetly packed off before either of them had time fully to succumb to the other's charms.

This passing attraction was insufficient to deflect Ruskin's concentrated passion for Adèle, which was soon revived, and burning even more fiercely than before, owing to the prolonged visit which she made to England during the Christmas of 1838.

He had already that year addressed to her the poem *Remembrance*, and now, hearing that Mr. Domecq had brought his four daughters to England to finish their education in a convent, Ruskin told himself that since "she really was in England, really over there, and that she was shut up in a convent and couldn't be seen by anyone, or spoken to, but by nuns, perhaps she wouldn't quite like it, and would like to come to Herne Hill again, and bear with me a little",<sup>4</sup> and could not be dissuaded from paying her a visit, as a result of which the whole family received another invitation to spend a few weeks at their father's partner's house. Though Adèle was already less beautiful than she had been at fifteen, all Ruskin's old ardour was immediately

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *Readings in Modern Painters* (Lecture 12): *Works*, vol. 22, p. 529.

<sup>3</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 228.

rekindled. And though Mrs. Ruskin was still adamantly opposed to any idea of marriage, it is possible that both John James and Mr. Domecq, aware of the young man's seriousness of intention, thought that another year's experience, and a closer acquaintance, might work some alteration in Adèle's feelings, in which case such other difficulties as there might be would be smoothed over. But whereas no less attentive than before, and doubtless less callow in his manners, Ruskin was still openly at her feet, Adèle only received his homage with the good-natured raillery of a woman who is supremely indifferent to, though she cannot help being flattered by, so complete an abasement.

When she left them this time, Ruskin must have realised that he could never now hope to kindle her indifferent heart; for his lamentations appeared promptly in the January number of the *London Monthly Miscellany*:

"Though thou hast not a feeling for me  
Who is torn by too many for thee,  
Yet oh! not entirely unknown  
To thy heart can the agony be  
Of him whom thou leftest alone  
By the green and cold surge of the sea. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Though carefully decorated with other suitable polite trappings, his despair was nevertheless very real; and, just as though he had been a maiden pining for marriage, once again John James tried to raise his spirits and repair the damage to his heart by arranging a suitable marriage for his son elsewhere.

The girl chosen for this purpose was a Miss Wardell, daughter of the prosperous merchant who had offices beneath those of the firm of Ruskin, Telford and Domecq in Billiter Street. Miss Wardell seems to have been so eligible on the counts of beauty, wealth, intelligence and education, that John James was even prepared to forego all his dreams of attaining a daughter-in-law of aristocratic birth. Young John was invited to the handsome Wardell home in Hampstead, and Miss Wardell repaid the visit by coming to see the cherished little collection of pictures at Herne Hill. It seems that, as their fathers had decided, the match would have been altogether suitable. Miss Wardell had tastes naturally akin to Ruskin's, was deeply impressed by *The Poetry of Architecture* and the Newdigate Prize, and was entirely suitable from every practical point of view. The one objection was the utterly unsurmountable one that Ruskin still loved Adèle, and, although he found Miss Wardell most agreeable, and dutifully did his best to please her, he could not, any more than anyone else in such circumstances, effect a change in his sentiments to order, and

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 78.



Miss Wardell's "dark and tender"<sup>1</sup> grace had no power to charm an imagination already dedicated to a handsome blonde.

When, after two meetings, his parents asked him seriously, in the clumsy but well-intentioned Victorian manner, what he thought of Miss Wardell, he could only reply that he thought her very nice, but that "she yet was not my sort of girl".<sup>2</sup> After which the matter was allowed to lapse, and the beautiful Miss Wardell, like the pathetic Miss Withers before her, finally fell into a decline—that scourge of delicately nurtured and unmated Victorian maidens—and died.

At the same time, one of Mrs. Ruskin's few friends, a Mrs. Cockburn, who was continually asserting—much to his mother's suppressed indignation—that John ought to go far more into society, one day procured him an invitation to dine with Lockhart and his "harebell-like daintiness of a daughter".<sup>3</sup> Too shy to express his deep admiration for Scott at dinner, Ruskin gauchely embarked upon theological topics; and though later, in the drawing-room, he did his utmost to please the dark-eyed high-foreheaded Charlotte, he was very sorry and pained to think that she might be glad—when it was time for her to retire to bed.

Meantime Adèle, with the help of her good-natured father, who was soon to prove himself adept at finding aristocratic husbands for his daughters, had become engaged to a rich, handsome and rather dashing Baron Duquesne, who seems to have possessed, unlike poor Ruskin, all the qualities that she admired in the male.

Painful as this was, to prolong his sufferings—and this seems to be the one really unnecessary and cruel part of the story—Adèle was invited with her sisters to spend the following Christmas at Herne Hill yet once again. No one seemed to know whether or not Ruskin knew of her engagement, and his parents evidently feared to tell him lest they should increase his melancholy. For an ardent, sensitive and exquisitely proud youth, the weeks that followed must have been torture. When it was time for the girls to return to Paris, Ruskin went with them to the boat to say good-bye. His pain was now so acute that everyone about him was aware of it. Years later, John James told Lady Burne-Jones that he considered this to have been the unhappiest day of his son's life: and even Mrs. Ruskin admitted that nothing that happened to him later had wounded him so deeply.

Inevitably, Ruskin sought consolation in the expression of his grief in the long poem *Farewell*. "If it is to be a *Farewell*, it is a deuced lucky thing there is no omnibus waiting,"<sup>4</sup> he wrote the following May to W. L. Harrison when he sent it to him for *Friendship's Offering*, with the delicately acid humour that never deserted him

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 33, p. 231-2.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 9.5.1840: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 193.

even at his darkest moments; and for once his verses are truly expressive of his inmost heart.

“ . . . Farewell! a darkness and a dread  
Have checked my heart and chilled my brow;  
And there are tears which must be shed—  
Oh deeply, wildly, but not now.  
While thou art near, I cannot weep:  
They come—they come, the lonely years,  
Whose wings of desolation keep  
Enough of time for tears.

“Think not this bitterness can cease,  
When these first throbs have burst their way—  
Alas! this parting is like peace,  
Beside the pangs of dark delay,  
That round my spirit move and brood,  
Day after day, a gloomier host,  
Encompassing the solitude  
Whence thou art longer lost. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

The following March, during term time at Christ Church, he learned that she was married. There was a howling wind, and, distracted with grief, he staggered down the dark passage to a friend's room, and tried to dull his pain by working with him through interminable mathematical problems. Then, as he later confided to Clayton, he set himself to compose Herodotean poems, and dashed off *Psammenitus* in two hours “as a relief from strong and painful excitement”.

Finally he composed *Agonia*, the last poem that he was ever to write her.

“When Love's long glance is dark with pain—  
With none to meet or cheer;  
And words of woe are wild in vain  
For those who cannot hear;

When earth is dark, and memory  
Pale in the heaven above,  
The heart can bear to lose its joy,  
But not to cease to love.

But what shall guide the choice within,  
Of guilt or agony—  
When to remember is to sin,  
And to forget—to die.”<sup>2</sup>

As with many others in similar circumstances, it was long before he could forget: and when he did, he did not die. He worked even more

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 207.

frenziedly in preparation for his finals, and at the diverse other subjects which occupied his time.

Then, one evening at the beginning of the summer term, he was surprised "by a short tickling cough . . . preceded by a curious sensation in the throat, and followed by a curious taste in the mouth, which I presently perceived to be that of blood".<sup>1</sup> Ruskin walked round to his mother's lodgings and told her what had happened.

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 259.

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## Chapter II

1. *Illness: his passion for Turner: the first defence: first meeting with his "earthly master": Turner's career.* 2. *Visit to the Queen's Physician: departure for Italy: a leisurely journey: first impressions of Italy: Rome: Severn and Richmond: Miss Tollemache.* 3. *Departure for Naples: the second haemorrhage: genesis of "Modern Painters": exaltation at Chamouni: return to Herne Hill.*

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I  
MARGARET RUSKIN, at last vindicated in her own eyes for an immanence that she must have known could only be embarrassing to her son, behaved with her customary calm efficiency. She put her son to bed, and a local doctor was called who prescribed the usual rest. Oxford must be given up for the present, and there must be no intellectual or physical strain of any kind.

So, with the somewhat reluctant consent of the Dean, who was not pleased to lose one of the few brilliant men that Christ Church had recently produced, the taking of the degree was postponed, and Ruskin removed to the quiet of Herne Hill, where instead of remaining in bed for several months, he was soon applying himself with characteristic energy to his favourite occupations.

It was during this time that Ruskin came under the influence of Turner, the man he was henceforward to call his earthly master. In 1836, Turner's pictures exhibited in the Academy had evoked from certain sections of the press a furore of abuse. The three pictures shown were *Juliet and her Nurse*, *Rome from Mount Aventine* and *Mercury and Argus*. *Blackwood's*, in particular, was outstanding in detraction. The scene of *Juliet and her Nurse* was "thrown higgledy-piggledy together, streaked blue and pink, and thrown into a flour tub". *Rome from Mount Aventine* was "a most unpleasant mixture, wherein white gamboge and raw siena" were, with childish execution, daubed together; while of *Mercury and Argus* it was affirmed that "the Hanging Committee should be suspended for admitting it. It is perfectly childish. All blood and chalk".<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin was the first to be stung to act in Turner's defence, and immediately sat down to compose an excoriating reply, in which he castigated the "combination of ignorance and bad taste"<sup>2</sup> displayed by the critic, refuted his assertions one by one, proclaimed that

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1836, pp. 550-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 3, p. 635.

Turner was "Shakesperian in his mightiness",<sup>1</sup> and maintained that art criticism should be "delegated to persons who could judge accurately, feel deeply, and write correctly; not to critics of so fastidious a disposition as to discover vulgarity in the mind of Murillo, and childishness in the pencil of Turner".<sup>2</sup>

Instead of being dispatched to *Blackwood's*, this effusion was first shown to John James, who, cautious and deferential, sent it to the painter in case he should resent such an ambitious defence. But Turner, who was now an old man, and inured by years of experience to the fickleness and folly of most journalistic praise and blame, sent a courteous word of thanks for the "zeal, kindness and trouble taken on his behalf",<sup>3</sup> and asked permission to send the paper to the owner of *Juliet*. Though Ruskin was thus denied the satisfaction of seeing his article in print, he had at least established to his father his admiration of the master, and in the future, whenever John James wished to encourage or indulge his son, he gave him one of Turner's works.

Their first acquisition, bought during the following year, was the *Richmond*, which gave them both exceeding pleasure in that it contained "trees, architecture, water, a lovely sky, and a clustered bouquet of brilliant figures".<sup>4</sup> This was followed by the *Gosport*, while, to celebrate his coming of age, Ruskin's father settled upon young John an income of £200 a year, and also presented him with the *Winchelsea* for his college rooms.

Now that he possessed an income of his own, Ruskin made a mistake that caused friction between his father and himself for many years. Ruskin particularly admired one of Turner's sketches of Harlech, but the dealer, Griffiths, professed to be uncertain whether it was for sale or not. One day when Ruskin was at the private view of the Water-Colour Society, he heard from Griffiths that the sketch really was for sale after all. Without consulting his father, or asking the price, the delighted Ruskin immediately said that he would take it. The price turned out to be £70—considerably more than had been demanded for any of the previous ones—and John James thinking that the dealer had unscrupulously added £20 on the spot, was deeply vexed with his son's lamentable lack of acumen. He henceforward distrusted his son's ability in all business transactions, continually thwarted him and complained at the way he wasted his money. This made Ruskin frequently nervous to ask his father to buy pictures which would afterwards have proved excellent investments, and he consequently laboured under an unexpressed sense of grievance.

It was shortly after this incident, on 22 June, 1840 (although there

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 638.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 640.

<sup>3</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

are inaccurate reports of their having met before while Turner was drawing in the back parlour of a print seller at Oxford), that Ruskin, dining as a favoured client with the picture dealer at Norwood, was (as he noted in his diary) "introduced to the man who beyond all doubt is the greatest of the age. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

J. M. W. Turner, born on 23 April, 1775, had shown signs of genius at an early age; and although an artistic friend had told his father: "Mr. Turner, it is no use; the boy will never do anything; he is impenetrably dull, sir; it is throwing your money away; better make him a tinker, sir, or a cobbler, than a perspective artist,"<sup>2</sup> he had been admitted a student of the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen. Earning a living and gaining experience at the dreariest hack work, copying "peachy and exquisite women", and "dignified and senatorial men" at the house of Reynolds, then nearing the end of his career, Turner had early acquired a wonderful proficiency in his recreations of the English scene, and was elected A.R.A. in 1800. Collaborating with Scott in *Provincial Antiquities* in 1818, by making drawings for that work at the period when the novelist was at the height of his powers, it was not until 1826 that he became known to the general public by illustrating Murray's octavo edition of Byron, and four years later, by his famous illustrations for Rogers' *Italy*. Though these, his illustrations for the *Poems*, and his drawings for Finden's *Landscape and Portrait Illustrations of Byron*, issued the previous year, gave him a certain claim to fame, his landscape paintings remained little known outside the small circle of connoisseurs who were his patrons. Throughout the greater part of his life the prevailing taste was for the work of his rival Claude, and when Turner bequeathed two of his favourite landscape paintings to the National Gallery, he made it a condition that a painting by Claude should be hung between them.

Disliking the works of his great contemporary, Constable, and keeping the secrets of his personal methods with a tenacious caution, Turner had, by the time that Ruskin met him, acquired a handsome fortune and a number of idiosyncrasies that bordered upon the eccentric. Although his friends have testified to the generosity that underlay his notorious miserliness and surly manner, Turner's enemies were less charitable, and one of them described him as "short, stumpy, and vulgar, without one redeeming personal qualification, slovenly in dress, not over cleanly, and devoid of all signs of the habits of a gentleman, or a man moving in good society". Indeed, there is even a story that, after creating a scene with a print seller who had inadvertently placed in his window a defective print of one of the plates of the *Liber Studiorum*, the shopkeeper said to the great painter: "Well, sir, I have long desired to see you, and now that I have seen you, I hope

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Thornbury, *Life of Turner* (1862), p. 29.

I shall never see you again, for a more disagreeable person I have never met."<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Ruskin's meeting with Turner seems to have been the prelude to a round of social activities which were abruptly terminated by a second haemorrhage. This time there was greater consternation, and Ruskin was taken without delay to see the Queen's physician, Sir James Clarke, who pronounced that the patient must give up all idea of study, and seek a warmer climate without delay. When Ruskin insisted that he wished to stay at home until the autumn to pass his finals, the physician is said to have replied: "Sir, if you go on till October, you'll get your death before you get your degree".<sup>2</sup> And so the point was carried.

In 1840, a warmer climate seems to have been considered the one favourable treatment for tuberculosis. Declining maidens and stricken young men were dispatched to the south, dragging their diseased and exhausted bodies in comfortless coaches beneath burning suns, to die at last in alien Italy. The journey was one of great vicissitude of mind and temper, but Ruskin, as usual, sketched, wrote copious notes and continued with the composition of *The Broken Chain*, a long, elaborate, sonorous, obscure and unnecessary poem reminiscent of the imaginative-romantic verse narrative of Scott and Coleridge.

Some of the drawings made at this time, and during the following year, in the manner of David Roberts and of Prout, were of a singular delicacy and beauty. Like most amateurs, Ruskin suffered from a good deal of conflicting advice. Harding had told him never to use a lead pencil or a brush while sketching, but to do everything in chalk; de Wint told him to use nothing but a brush and moist colours, and Turner advised everything. "I shall take his advice," Ruskin told Acland in a letter, "for your material should vary with your subject."<sup>3</sup> On the whole he felt irritable and depressed, a condition largely the result of his illness which was undoubtedly more serious at this time than was generally believed.

"I have not made up my mind about St. Peter's yet,"<sup>4</sup> he told Clayton less than a week after their arrival at the Eternal City; but by the end of the month he was informing the Rev. Thomas Dale with characteristic vehemence: "St. Peter's I expected to be *disappointed* in. *I was disgusted*. . . . The Capitol is a melancholy rubbishy square of average Palladian-modern; the Forum a good

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Frith, *My Autobiography* (1887), vol. i, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 420.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 1.9.1840: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 432.

group of smashed columns . . . the Coliseum I have always considered a public nuisance . . . the rest of the ruins mountains of shapeless brick."<sup>1</sup>

But though he refused to be pleased by the usual sights that rejoiced the heart of most foreign tourists, he found innumerable glimpses of unimagined beauty of his own. "There is not a fragment, a stone or a chimney, ancient or modern, that is not in itself a study, not an inch of ground that can be passed over without its claim of admiration or offer of instruction."<sup>2</sup>

Henry Acland had given Ruskin letters of introduction to George Richmond and his brother who were both painting in Rome, and also to Joseph Severn, in whose arms Keats had died twenty years before. When Ruskin first toiled up a long flight of stairs to Severn's lodging, Severn and Richmond, who were descending, and had no idea who he was, passed him on one of the landings; whereupon Severn cried out to his friend, "What a poetical countenance!"<sup>3</sup> Soon the two men, Severn short, rubicund and beaming, Richmond slight and pale, with a noble forehead and vivid, kind dark eyes, were dining with the Ruskins, and, if continually provoked by Ruskin's arbitrary opinions, their conversations with whom "were apt to resolve themselves into delicate disguises of necessary reproof",<sup>4</sup> they soon fell under the spell of John James' genial charm, and were both at pains to assure the disconcerted father that his son's unorthodox opinions would soon pass, and in a few weeks he would be brought round to a right-minded and proper appreciation of the monuments of the Italian capital.

In addition to the society of cultured men no less devoted to art and literature than himself, there were other attractions. Church services, in all their splendour of Roman vestments, music, incense and Gregorian chants, though severely disapproved by his Protestant conscience, made an undeniable appeal to his sensibilities. There were also occasional glimpses of the golden-haired and beautiful Miss Tollemache, the young queen of the English circle in Rome. But even though Ruskin would wander the hot streets alone in the hope of seeing her, it does not seem to have occurred to him that Severn could easily have arranged an introduction, and he did not meet her until many years later.

## 3

Early in January the family left for Naples. But the bad roads and the cold of the journey tired and disappointed him, so that often he could only wonder why the impressions that the mere thought of in

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 380-1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*



London had made him so excited, now left him as dull and depressed as the most monotonous day in London. However, here Ruskin made several large drawings, and made elaborate records in his diary. "A beautiful effect on St. Eleno I would have given anything to keep—its beautiful outline was dark against streaks of blue sky and white cloud—horizontal—and yet its mass was touched with sun in places, so as to give it colour and solidity; clouds like smoke, hovering on the hill below and enclosing the sky-opening, and the square masses of the city in shade, one or two houses only coming out in fragments of sunlight, the smoke from the palace manufactory close to one rose in an oblique column, terminating in a lovely line of blue mist. It was a Turner".<sup>1</sup>

These activities were presently supplemented by an excursion up Vesuvius, which had disastrous results. "The enormous mass of sulphurous vapour constantly forced down on Naples has a marked effect on the climate, turning healthy people into hypochondriacs, and *vice versa*. It half killed my father, and did not do me much good, for on the way back to Rome I had the most serious attack of the chest affection I have had at all, blood coming three days running, and once afterwards, and I have been threatened with it at intervals ever since. . . . Since my last attack of blood I have not studied at all. Doctors and my own feelings agree in one point—that hard mental labour of any kind hurts me instantly. I ascribe this to the simple physical fact that during laborious thought the breath is involuntarily held and the chest contracted for several minutes together. Whatever causes it, I am obliged, for the present, to give up thought of University or anything else."<sup>2</sup> So he wrote later, on 9 June, to Dale, his old tutor. The attack came on while he was taking a mild saunter in the shade with his parents a few days later. As soon as they returned to their inn, John James set out to Rome to fetch a doctor. This worthy informed the anxious parents that such an attack was quite natural in the spring, pocketed a fee for the information, and left the Ruskins to deal with the contingency as best they might. They returned to Rome, and then, after a month of intermittent confinement, during which Ruskin was afraid to stoop or move across his room lest another haemorrhage should occur, finally agreed that as a curative resort Rome had been a signal failure; and decided to try the higher altitude of Switzerland instead. During the despondent interim, there were occasions when both his parents and himself thought that he must inevitably die. To Clayton he wrote from Naples on 12 February: "The least speaking or reading makes me hoarse, and if I go on for a quarter of an hour my throat gets irritated and makes me cough; so how I am to preach I cannot tell. . . . The worst of it is, it checks me in taking up any design that requires time. I have begun a work of

<sup>1</sup> *Diary* (17.1.1841): *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter of 9.6.1841: Works*, vol. 1, pp. 388-9.

some labour which would take me several years to complete, but I cannot read for it, and do not know how many years I may have for it. I don't know if I shall even be able to get my degree; and so I must remain in a jog-trot, sufficient-for-the-day style of occupation—lounging, planless, undecided and uncomfortable, except when I can go out to sketch—my chief enjoyment.”<sup>1</sup> Thus for the first time we hear doubts of his possible disability for the ministry; and also mention of the embryo work that was later to develop into *Modern Painters*.

To augment his despondency, moreover, on the first evening of their journey they fell in with a handsome young Scotsman mortally ill who died during the night. However, a sight of Venice the next day put Ruskin into better spirits, and he was presently recording excitedly: “Sunsets such as Turner in his maddest moments never came up to”,<sup>2</sup> and thanking God that he was there: “It is the paradise of cities. . . . This, and Chamouni, are my two bournes of Earth”.<sup>3</sup> And so they were to remain for him until the end.

From Venice the family went by Padua, Milan and Turin to Susa, and over the Cenis, where the first breezes from the Alps already brought Ruskin an increase of energy, and to his parents, new hope.

Presently there came a summer morning when he woke at six o'clock in his tiny room in the inn at Lans-le-Bourg; looked out of the window, saw “red aiguilles on the north relieved against pure blue—the great pyramid of snow down the valley in one sheet of eastern light”,<sup>4</sup> dressed in haste, had soon traversed the village street, a stream, and the intervening slope, and was gazing, by the first pines, at the scene about him, in an ecstasy of gratitude and wonder. “I had found my life again,” he wrote years later in *Praeterita*—“all the best of it. What good of religion, love, admiration or hope had ever been taught me, or felt by my best nature, rekindled at once; and my line of work, both by my own will and the aid granted to it by fate in the future, determined for me. I went down thankfully to my father and mother, and told them I was sure I should get well.”<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the month, in the same mood of confidence, they had reached Rochester; and Ruskin rejoiced anew at ascending Herne Hill and seeing again, after an absence of nearly ten months, the sedate familiar house with its well-beloved garden, and its fruit-laden trees.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to a College Friend* (12.2.1841): *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 434-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary* (12.5.1841): *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxxix.

<sup>3</sup> *Praeterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

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## Chapter III

1. Effie: "*The King of the Golden River*": journey to Wales: cure under Jephson: reluctance for the ministry: "*The Broken Chain*": he takes his degree. 2. Difficulties with his father: admiration of Blake. 3. Holiday in Switzerland: the new attack upon Turner: "*Modern Painters*" takes form. 4. The move to Denmark Hill: at work on his book: meetings with old friends: publication of "*Modern Painters*". 5. The argument of the book: the value of truth: a work of art is not an imitation: praise of Turner: advice to young artists: the duty of the critic. 6. Opinions on the book: Wordsworth: the Brownings: Prout: Charlotte Brontë: George Eliot: Woolner: John James' delight: an evening with Turner. 7. "*Blackwood's*" censure: John James' concern: Ruskin's "rod in pickle."

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I

FOR a month Ruskin remained at Herne Hill, during which period the family received a visit from Mr. and Mrs. George Gray of Perth, and their eldest daughter Euphemia, whom they called Effie. George Gray was a solicitor, an old friend, and a distant family connection of John James; and Effie, a pretty and lively little girl with fair hair and a fresh complexion, was much intrigued by the tall young man whom everybody said was so brilliant, who drew so beautifully and who wrote poems for all the famous annuals. She was shown his minerals and his drawings, she saw the architectural articles in *Loudon's Magazines*: but she would have been far better pleased to know that he wrote fairy stories like Grimm—and frankly told him so. At which Ruskin, always eager to give pleasure, in particular to charming and intelligent young girls, told her that he would see what he could do, while she laughed delightfully, and assured him that she was quite sure he would fail. Thus teased and flattered, he set to work on *The King of the Golden River*, which he finished a few weeks later: though it was not published until 1850, when, illustrated by Doyle, it enjoyed a big success. But after the heights of Switzerland, the heights of Herne Hill seemed dull and enervating, and since Ruskin felt certain that if only he could be left to himself among mountains, he would soon get well, he presently persuaded his parents to let him go to Wales with his old friend Richard Fall. A little cottage of his own somewhere amongst mountains had been his dream now for many months. He had written of it from Venice the previous May to Clayton. "I was thinking of getting some small space in Wales for a laboratory, and to hold my minerals, among the hills,

where I could have a poney and grow my own cabbages; and then you must come and stay with me, and plan rooms, and put up book-cases together.”<sup>1</sup> But just as, later, he was to plan in vain a chalet for himself amongst the Swiss Alps, so too this cherished wish, so modest in the circumstances, which he had not the heart to press to his parents, came to nothing.

On the way to Wales, he had promised his parents to stop at Leamington to consult the famous Dr. Jephson, a man of considerable acumen who, though known as a quack by other members of his profession, nevertheless effected remarkable cures by measures of his own. After a thorough examination, he assured the patient that he could cure him in six weeks if he would remain at Leamington; but Ruskin, intent on Wales, said that he would follow any treatment he prescribed elsewhere. John James, however, who had been told of the interview by letter, insisted upon a change of plans. And finding orders to this effect after he had crossed the border, Ruskin dutifully said good-bye to Fall, and returned.

For the next six weeks he lived in tiny lodgings near the Wells and religiously followed Dr. Jephson's exacting cure. He drank the waters; he breakfasted on herb tea, he lived on two meals of bread, water, and one flesh dish a day, without fruit or vegetables: walked twice a day, and retired early. The regime had good effect. He went to the library, bought Agassiz's *Poissons Fossiles* to further his geology, some novels by Captain Marryat; renewed his stock of paints, and started an ambitious, imaginary drawing “after Turner”, and to think about the future, which, a few months before, it seemed that he would never have. And the more he considered it, the more reluctant he began to feel at the thought of embracing the profession of an evangelical clergyman. If he must teach and preach (and never for a moment, at this period, did he doubt his vocation for doing both), could he not do it far more effectively by means of his unusual gifts? Or were all his own interests and activities merely a subtle and elaborate form of self-indulgence? In a letter of 22 September to his old tutor Dale, he voiced these embarrassing misgivings. “Is it a time to be spelling of letters, or touching of strings, counting stars or crystallising dew-drops, while the earth is falling under our feet, and our fellows are departing every instant into eternal pain? Or, on the other hand, is not the character and kind of intellect which is likely to be drawn into these occupations employed to the fullest measure and to the best advantage in them? Would not the great part of it be useless and inactive if otherwise directed? Do not the results of its labour remain, exercising an influence, if not directly spiritual, yet ennobling and purifying, on all humanity, to all time? Was not the energy of Galileo, Newton, Davy, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Handel, employed more effectively to the glory of God in the results and lessons it has

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to a College Friend* (16.5.1841): *Works*, vol. 1, p. 452.

left, than if it had been occupied all their life-time in direct priestly exertion, for which, in all probability, it was less adapted and in which it would have been comparatively less effectual. . . . Is an individual, then, who has the power of choice, in any degree to yield to his predilections in so important a matter? I myself have little pleasure in the idea of entering the Church, and have been attached to the pursuits of art and science, not by a flying fancy, but as long as I can remember, with settled and steady desire. How far am I justified in following them up?"<sup>1</sup>

As with most dilemmas of such an order, it was circumstance, and no act of will, which finally moulded the shape of Ruskin's future activities. Meantime, at Leamington, he continued with his elaborate imaginary painting of the Château of Amboise; finished *The King of the Golden River*, wrote some more of the interminable broken chain, and made excursions to Kenilworth and Stratford-on-Avon: until the prescribed six weeks were over, and Jephson let him go.

From Leamington Ruskin went to visit his old college tutor Walter Brown, now married: and thence returned to Herne Hill, whither Osborne Gordon had been summoned to help coach him for his belated degree, and Harding inveigled in order to give him drawing lessons. The following May he went up to Oxford to take his degree, and passed with honours. Placed in the Class List in his Pass Work, although he had sat only for an ordinary pass degree, he was announced a Double Fourth Class man—being an Honorary Class man in Classics and Mathematics—an unsolicited distinction that to-day would be equivalent to a Double First.

## 2

But it was in the realm of art, rather than of scholarship, that Ruskin was now making his most significant discoveries; and, as with the genesis of certain scientific inventions, the most important of these was completely accidental. On one of his frequent walks to Norwood, he saw one day a piece of ivy gracefully disposed about a thorn stem, and, with growing appreciation, proceeded to draw it as carefully as he could. The fixed attention to every serration and every vein taught him, as no one and nothing had ever taught him before, both the complete and unsurpassable beauty of natural form, and the exceeding folly of any man who fancies that it can be improved upon by human imagination. Thus, by practical application, he established one of the main principles of his future philosophy of art.

No less significant was his still rapturous appreciation of Turner; and the strange and fatal cloud that it was to cast upon his future relations with his father.

The source of the new difficulties between them was this. Turner,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 396-8.

who was tired of public indifference, but wished to make a new series of studies, submitted to his agent Griffiths four finished drawings as samples, and rough sketches of a series of a further fifteen, which he would complete only if he received definite commissions from collectors. These sketches were duly exhibited to his patrons; and nine of the sketches were formally ordered in advance. Ruskin, by using every means of ingenious cajolery that he could think of, managed to persuade his father to allow them to order the two which he most favoured. In addition to these two, however, he also lusted to possess the *Splugen*, one of the four finished sketches that was already to be seen. But as his father was away, remembering his irritation over the purchase of the *Gosport*, he dared neither to buy it on his own account nor to try to persuade his father to do so by letter. Convinced that it was not only amongst Turner's finest work, but the finest Swiss landscape that man had ever painted, he felt, however, that he could soon lure him into the transaction upon his return. Meantime, however, it was bought instead for eighty guineas by the collector Munro of Novar. And later, when John James attempted to buy it from him, the collector put an excessive price upon it, raising it, at every new effort, until it reached four hundred guineas; at which point he gave up making offers.

This delicate and embarrassing situation between a father and son wholly devoted to each other was never to be resolved. Indulgent though he was, John James would never permit his son, even when fully adult, to buy anything of value without his approbation; and Ruskin was therefore continually missing wonderful treasures because he was too nervous to ask his father to buy them, or else his father had insufficient faith in his taste. This inevitably created a latent and abiding sense of grievance that in later life he was unable wholly to suppress. A further incident of the same sort was to occur within the following year, when George Richmond took Ruskin to a dealer's to look at some drawings of his late friend, Blake. Ruskin was enchanted by the works and, with his usual flair, was prepared to buy them, at a time long before they were considered to be of uncontested merit. Indeed, in a moment of characteristic enthusiasm he said that he would take the whole portfolio. A few days later, however, he was writing to his friend in extreme agitation, to seek his aid in diminishing his liability to four drawings only. It seems that Richmond had already managed to persuade the dealer to lower his price from £150 to £100, which made Ruskin's compunction all the greater. By the tone of the letter, it is evident that he had worked himself into a state of considerable agitation. "Since I last saw you I have been looking very carefully over the portfolio of Blake's drawings, and I have got nervous about showing them to my father when he comes home, in the mass. He has been *very* good to me—lately—with respect to some efforts which I desired to make under the idea that Turner

would not long be able to work—and these efforts he has made under my frequent assurances that I should never be so captivated by any other man. Now I am under great fear that when he hears of my present purchase, it will make him lose confidence in me, and cause him discomfort which I wish I could avoid. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Yet more tragic for Ruskin, there was a day when Turner arrived at Denmark Hill with a package under his arm wrapped in a dirty piece of paper, which contained all his sketches for the Rivers of France. “You shall have the whole series, John,” he said, “unbroken, for twenty-five guineas apiece.”<sup>2</sup> There were sixty-two in the series, and John James thought his son was mad to contemplate the idea. Later, when the collection was split up, Ruskin had to pay £1,000 for seventeen of the drawings alone.

## 3

After passing his examinations, Ruskin’s parents asked him what he would like to do next: and, pining for the mountains and the tonic air of Switzerland, he begged to be allowed to spend the greater part of the summer at his beloved Chamouni. In the middle of May, the family party set off, staying abroad until the third week of August, and travelling to their destination across France, and back along the Rhine and through Belgium. By now the Ruskins had discovered that the family travelling carriage was something of an encumbrance “taking much time and ingenuity to load, needing at the least three, usually four horses, and on Alpine passes six, not only jolted and lagged painfully on bad roads, but was liable in every way to more awkward discomfitures than lighter vehicles; getting itself jammed in archways, wrenched with damage out of ruts, and involved in volleys of justifiable reprobation among market stalls”.<sup>3</sup> So now Margaret and John James had their own old-fashioned light two-horse carriage to themselves, while Ruskin had a second one made to his own design, with “any quantity of front and side pockets for books and picked up stones; and hung very low, with a fixed side step, which he could get off or on while the horses were at the trot; and at any rise or fall of the road, relieve them, and get his own walk, without troubling the driver to think of him”.<sup>4</sup>

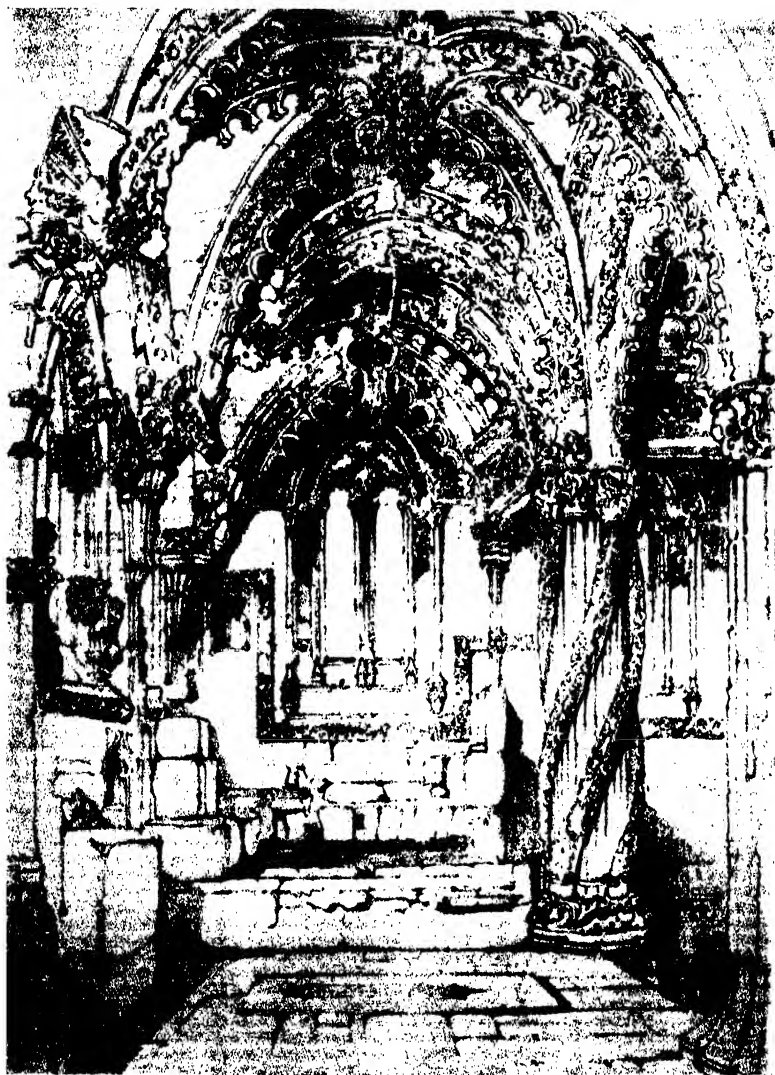
Once abroad, he pursued all his old habits with the vigour of renewed health and a mind free from the urgency of arbitrary study. After one short, frightening attack of fever, he examined with scientific interest the geological formation of Mont Blanc; chipped off bits of rock with his little hammer, and spent completely blissful hours in the open air, joyfully sensitive to every phase of nature, while

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1843 (?): *Works*, vol. 36, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 13, p. li.

<sup>3</sup> *Proserpina: Works*, vol. 25, p. 454.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.



V. THE CHAPEL OF ROSLIN, 1838

*By John Ruskin*





VI. THE AUTHOR OF "MODERN PAINTERS", 1843

*By G. Richmond, R.A.*

he drew, no longer after the manner of Prout or Turner, but in his individual way, the beautiful and truthful contours of any wayside tree or clump of flowers that attracted his responsive eye.

So might he have gone on, recording the vision of an accurate and curious eye made understanding by the gratitude and veneration of a responsive heart, both in lucid fragments of expressive prose, and careful images of an experienced hand, had not an interruption from the external world served to harness essential experience and his lucid reflections upon it to one specific argument.

W. L. Harrison sent John James some literary magazines containing more of the now fashionable onslaughts upon Turner. Ruskin had seen the objects of their detraction in the Academy before he left home; and was as passionately indignant at the wanton lack of perception of the critics as he had been as an ardent youth. "They are produced," said the *Literary Gazette* of Turner's masterpieces, "as if by throwing handfuls of white, and blue, and red, at the canvas, letting what chanced to stick; and then shadowing in some forms to make the appearance of a picture. . . . No. 353 caps all before for absurdity, without even any of the redeeming qualities of the rest. It represents Buonaparte—facetiously described as 'the exile and the rock limpet'—standing on the seashore at St. Helena. . . . The whole thing is so truly impossible that the *risum teneatis* even of the Amici is absolutely impossible."<sup>1</sup> No less full of invective was the august *Athenæum*. "This gentleman has on former occasions chosen to paint with cream, or chocolate, yolk of egg or currant jelly—here he uses the whole array of kitchen stuff," said their jocund reviewer. "We cannot believe in any future revolution, which shall bring the world round to the opinion of the worshipper, if worshipper such frenzies still possess."<sup>2</sup>

Thus a slender young man, sensitive and ardent, gazing with eyes as clear and blue as its waters across the lovely lake of Geneva, was inspired to effect the revolution which the mistaken reviewer had thought to be an impossible joke.

At nine o'clock one morning at Chamouni shortly afterwards, Ruskin, with particular intent, noted a strange effect upon Mont Blanc. "The Pavilion hills are green and clear, with the pearly clearness that foretells rain; the sky above is fretted with spray of white compact textured cloud which looks like flakes of dead arborescent silver. Over the snow, this is concentrated into a cumulus of the Turner character, not heaped, but laid sloping on the mountain, silver white at its edge, pale grey in interior; the whole of the snow is cast into shadow by it, and comes dark against it, especially the lower curve of the Aiguille du Gouter. But on the summit the cloud is melted into mist, and what I suppose to be a heavy snowstorm is

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Gazette*, no. 1321, 14 May, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> *Athenæum*, no. 759, 14 May, 1842.

falling on the Grand Plateau, and in the hollow behind the Grands Mulets; into this shower the mountain retires gradually, and the summit is entirely veiled. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Even more carefully than ever did he observe in future every evanescent trick of sky and cloud, with reference to the more dramatic performances of his earthly master.

Clearly he was now full of energy and high spirits. "Chamouni is such a place," he wrote in August to Walter Brown. "There is no sky like its sky. . . . There is no air like its air. . . . Coming down from Chamouni into the lower world is like coming out of open morning air into an ale-house parlour where people have been sleeping and smoking with the door shut all night; and for its earth, there is not a stick nor a stone in the valley that is not toned with the majestic spirit. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

At last fully restored to health, and with a definite object now before him, he gave himself up to collect material for the work which will remain forever associated with his name.

## 4

That autumn the family moved house from Herne Hill to the mansion at Denmark Hill that was to remain Ruskin's one permanent home until both his parents were dead. The sales of Messrs. Ruskin, Telford and Domecq, who still only produced "the best wine that could be given for the highest price to which the public would go", tenderly husbanded by the shrewd, cautious and ambitious John James, had steadily increased, despite his growing propensity to longer holidays and more varied tours, until he was now in possession of a very substantial fortune. John James, in fact, was at last a "warm" man, as it was by tactful circumlocution called in later days. And having hitherto preserved an extreme modesty and decorum over living expenses, it seemed to him now that it was high time to give the world a more suitable idea of his resources. He was a little embarrassed, if ever one of Ruskin's grand Christ Church friends called by chance, at the lack of amenities of their suburban home; and if his son was to make the brilliant career and the brilliant marriage that he had always anticipated, it was only fitting that he should be shown to advantage in a more splendid background. Mrs. Ruskin, at first, was not so confident. It would be nice to have a larger garden, and to grow handsome flowers and prize vegetables, it was true—but she could never forget that she was the daughter of a public-house keeper at Croydon, and she felt a little diffident at the prospect. But it so happened that a sedate, dignified and altogether commendable house not far away was on the market: a house with large, well proportioned rooms, quiet dignity, with several acres of grounds, a porter's lodge,

<sup>1</sup> *Diary* (23.6.1844): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of August, 1842: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 223, n.

stables, and even sties for pigs and sheds for cows. The idea of skimming her own cream, making her own butter and serving her own pork, and even of sending "kind presents of a part of the little fat friends" complete with Portugal onions for stuffing (as she and John James used to do to Turner) finally overcame her reluctance; and she somewhat reluctantly agreed that it was a more suitable place for John's grand friends to come to from their town residences in Grosvenor Square, than the little house at Herne Hill was, happy though they had always been there. So a long lease of the house was bought, and she carefully arranged her pots in the handsome greenhouse, while John James bought a carriage, and (as he felt befitted his new position) acquired family arms, which he had emblazoned upon the doors. These arms were adapted from the family coat of the Ruskins, of whom nothing seemed to be known: *sable*, a *chevron* between six lance heads, *argent*, by an addition on the chevron of three crosslets *gules* ("in case of my still becoming a clergyman," as Ruskin used to say later);<sup>1</sup> and for crest, after much poring over heraldic books, a boar's head was chosen, and the motto "age quod agis"—a crest which John would perversely call a pig, and himself a "little pig", and ten years later made his own by changing the motto into "to-day".

The Ruskin house at Denmark Hill, lavishly furnished with heavy Regency mahogany furniture, and becurtained and upholstered with the most durable fabrics in which all attempts at colour harmony had been avoided on a family principle that if you bought the best thing of its kind, nothing else mattered: a visit to which in order to see the Turners was so soon to become the fashion amongst aspiring artists and great ladies alike, was a symmetrical, dignified house of brick, with stone pilasters and cornice, built in the Georgian tradition, and approached by a wide, curving drive. Unpretentious, commodious, comfortable and solid, if there was little about it to attract, neither was there aught about its exterior to offend the critical eye.

Ruskin himself seems to have viewed the move with the indifference of the creative artist whose thoughts are fully absorbed by an important work. He had private ideas of digging a canal in the grounds, with elaborate locks where the slope was steep; and a faint nostalgia for the blossoming fruit trees of his youth—though here there was a proper orchard of a far more generous size. But it soon became evident that any spare water was required by the gardener, so he gave himself up more strenuously than ever to his work.

For his fine new study, which like his bedroom commanded from ample windows an agreeable view, surrounded by well filled shelves of books, and seated at an enormous desk that left little space in the large room for anything but a passage round it, he considered his

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 390.

notes, consulted his authorities, and gradually penned the chapters that enshrined his passionate, subtle, lucid thoughts and his arbitrary, original opinions in sonorous and elaborate prose. For reference, he had the Dulwich Gallery, the free run of Turner's gallery in Queen Anne Street, and the important private collections of Windus at Tottenham and a neighbour, Mr. Bicknell of Herne Hill. Yet despite concentrated reflections and careful formulations, he still had eyes for unusual aerial effects, and tricks of light and shadow; and even more ardent than ever was his excitement over Turner, who was preparing to do ten more drawings. "I am in a fever till I see the subjects,"<sup>1</sup> he noted on 16 January.

It was altogether an enjoyable winter. Every day he would read to his parents the results of his labours and receive their affectionate approbation. In January Osborne Gordon came to stay, and they went to the Zoo and to see Macready in *Macbeth*. There were days when Turner made himself particularly agreeable and invited him to take a glass of wine. There were the still delightful lessons from Harding; and for a birthday celebration his father gave him a special dinner party, with his "earthly master" as the guest of honour. "The happiest birthday evening save one I ever spent in my life," he recorded. "Turner happy and kind; all else fitting and delightful."<sup>2</sup>

Richard Fall was at home, too, and they took many walks together; and there were pleasurable meetings with Henry Acland, who was now walking the floors of St. George's Hospital, and with other friends. One week there might be a small party in Acland's rooms, with George Newton, George Richmond and Ruskin eager in philosophical discussion: another, they would foregather at Richmond's, who about this time moved house from Hampstead to York Street. "A dear fellow, and I am never with him without learning something," Acland recorded of their mutual friend at this time, whose water-colour portrait of Ruskin (under the mistaken name of John Raskin) had appeared in the Academy Exhibition, the previous summer.

Legend has it that about this time Richmond had completed a crayon portrait of Acland which both artist and model alike considered a splendid likeness. Ruskin of course desired to see it, and was eagerly solicited for his opinion. At last he suddenly turned to the artist, famous in later years for the beauty, if not for the verisimilitude of his portraits, and remarked with gentle urbanity: "Now, Richmond, where is Henry?" Upon which an embarrassment so gloomy befell that, though the three young men took up their hats and walked off arm in arm, not a word was spoken between them until they had marched completely round the Park. It was Richmond of whom Ruskin wrote to Severn on 21 September, 1845: "I never hear one word of genuine feeling issue from anyone's mouth but yours, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Diary* (16.1.1843): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary* (8.2.1843): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xxx.

two Richmonds",<sup>1</sup> who one day remarked to Ruskin, when in a burst of brilliant rhetoric he was pouring contempt upon Claude that Turner might shine to greater advantage: "Ruskin, when your criticism is constructive, you talk like an angel; when it is destructive, you declaim like a demon."<sup>2</sup>

Steadily, as the winter passed, the pages accumulated on his desk: pages overscored in revision and correction, pages with slips of reconsidered paragraphs carefully pasted in, so that at last the manuscript achieved the same curious, tatterdemalion appearance that those of his admirer, and French translator, Proust, were to do years later. Then John Hobbes (usually known as George to distinguish him from his young master), the valet he had had ever since he had joined the company of the young blades at Oxford, was set to make a fair copy, so that he could correct, revise and recorrect anew. Sometimes a single sentence would be rewritten no less than five times, and he would spend a whole afternoon in turning some particularly felicitous phrase, until he was convinced that it could no further be improved.

When the book was at last as good as he could make it, the proud John James set himself to find a publisher for it. He had created himself his son's honorary literary agent from the first, corresponding lengthily with Harrison and Loudon; and selling *Salzette and Elephanta* to an Oxford printer for inclusion in a volume of Newdigate Prize Poems. Now he first approached the celebrated John Murray, at the height of his glory for having the immortal Byron upon his list. But Murray, in the manner of successful publishers, pronounced that the public was not interested in Turner, and suggested that the author should write quite a different book, upon the German school of painting, which it seemed was high in public favour. So John James, who had shrewdly refrained from submitting them the manuscript, offered it to the only slightly less successful house of Smith, Elder & Co. instead. Mr. George Smith, who was a neighbour at Herne Hill, was even so obliging as to offer to get John Murray to publish it after all, if John James really wished it: but John James was satisfied enough with Smith and Elder; and so it was that house that had the honour of being Ruskin's publisher for many years. Later, when the book had proved successful, John Murray sought to atone for his mistake by inviting Ruskin to contribute to the *Quarterly*.

Thus, in the first week of May 1843, there appeared by a Graduate of Oxford (the pseudonym being chosen because the young author feared that if his youth were known his observations would be speedily discounted) the first volume of *Modern Painters: Their superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting To all The Ancient Masters proved by examples of the True, the Beautiful, and the Intellectual, From the Works of Modern Artists, especially From those of J. M. W. Turner,*

<sup>1</sup> William Sharp, *Life and Letters of Joseph Severn* (1892), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 3, p. xxxv.

*Esq., R.A.* The title page bore the famous quotation from Wordsworth, and the book was dedicated to The Landscape Artists of England; the form was octavo in four hundred and fifty pages, and the price was twelve shillings.

## 5

Now that over a century has passed since the publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, and the book has done its work so well that to those now living it seems that there was never a time when the greatness of Turner was not a universally established fact, it is necessary to separate in the long, elaborate, discursive and intricate argument, the ephemeral from the essential; and to consider alone the essential in relation to the development of Ruskin's life and thought. As Ruskin was to write many years later in his preface to *Arrows of the Chace*: "In the building of a large book, there are always places where an indulged diffuseness weakens the fancy, and prolonged strain subdues the energy: when we have time to say all we wish, we usually wish to say more than enough; and there are few subjects we can have the pride of exhausting, without wearying the listener."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps of no great writer are these words truer, than of him who penned them.

Composed before the invention of photography, at a time when continental art, and Italian art in particular, was little known to the general public, it abounds, as do most of Ruskin's works, with arbitrary opinions, extravagances of enthusiasm, prejudiced judgments, and sudden vehement outbursts of arrogant condemnation. Every great man has his idiosyncrasies, and these, from the first, were to be Ruskin's. Many of his more immature strictures he himself revised: as he was to state later in his Cambridge *Inaugural Address*, he was never satisfied that he had handled a subject properly till he had contradicted himself at least three times. Some of them he maintained. All this is only of secondary importance. Taste has always been subject to laws of fashion; and critical judgments that have been reversed once are easily reversed again. It is unlikely that those admirers of later schools who ignorantly suppose Ruskin to be both insignificant and outmoded, and publish articles upon his aesthetic judgments that give the impression that they have been based, not upon any study of his work, but rather upon hurried conversations with scullery maids who have listened behind dining-room doors while Ruskin was being discussed within, will be dealt with any less gently by future generations than they have dealt with him. The main body of Ruskinian thought will become part of the integral outlook of a people when their fundamentally superficial criteria have crumbled into dust. For the main body of Ruskinian thought has the structure of eternity. It can afford to wait.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 470.

In the direct tradition of the greatest minds, going back, on the one hand, to Plato; extending forward, on the other, to such contemporary giants as Tolstoy and Proust, Ruskin's fundamental philosophy of art is based upon an exalted personal experience, which many poets and writers of our time have expressed in varying terms, from the Wordsworth whom he so much admired, to the John Cowper Powys who was a young man when he died. This experience is the conscious and joyful communion of the individual with the external, natural world: the serenity and wonder of simultaneous contemplation and apperception: the heightened emotional awareness of being a tiny mote in an immortal world. The astonishment, the illumination and gratitude: this is the initiation. Then, for the poet and the artist, comes the need to express the experience in individual terms. Without this essential understanding, and a wide culture based upon it, artistic criticism is unworthy of respect. It is this essential communion, joy and understanding which form the integrity that Ruskin calls the right moral state. This is very clearly expressed in one of his later Oxford Lectures. "You must first have the right moral state, or you cannot have art. But when the art is once obtained, its reflected action enhances and completes the moral state out of which it arose, and, above all, communicates the exultation to other minds which are already morally capable of the like. For instance take the art of singing, and the simplest perfect master of it—the skylark. From him you may learn what it is to sing for joy. You must get the moral state first, the pure gladness, then give it finished expression; and it is perfected in itself, and made communicable to others capable of such joy. Accuracy in proportion to the rightness of the cause, and purity of the emotion, is the possibility of fine art. You cannot paint or sing yourself into being good men; you must be good men before you can either paint or sing, and then the colour and sound will complete in you all that is best. No noble nor right style was ever yet founded but out of a sincere heart. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The essential greatness of a work of art can be judged in one way alone—by the value of the idea that it seeks to communicate: and "an idea has value in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received".<sup>2</sup> It is this—the capacity to appreciate great ideas—which is true taste, the faculty of extracting the utmost pleasure from the material world as it affects the essential uncorrupted element in us which we call the moral nature: the faculty, in short, of being receptive to the sublime.

Of all ideas which art seeks to communicate—ideas of imitation, of relation, of power, of beauty and of truth—that of truth is of the greatest value. Thus the object of the landscape painter is to transmit

<sup>1</sup> Lecture of 21.2.1870: *Works*, vol. 20, pp. 73 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Painters: Works*, vol. 3, p. 92.



a faithful record of the natural world, charged with the idea and emotion with which they were first regarded by the artist, so that the spectator shares in his experience, is thereby delivered from all that is base, and left not only delighted, but ennobled and instructed, under the sense of having beheld a new scene, held communion with a new mind, and endowed for a time with the keen perception and the impetuous emotions of a nobler and more penetrating intelligence.

Such communion evidently can be experienced only by a level of understanding which approximates to that of the artist. The highest art, being based upon sensations of peculiar minds, sensations occurring to *them* only at particular times, and to a plurality of mankind perhaps never, and being expressive of thoughts which could only rise out of a mass of the most extended knowledge, and of dispositions modified in a thousand ways by peculiarity of intellect, can only be met and understood by persons having some sort of sympathy with the high and solitary minds which produced it—sympathy only to be felt by minds in some degree high and solitary themselves. In consequence, the true meaning and end of art must be sealed to thousands, or misunderstood by them. And as the painter is sometimes obliged, in working out his own peculiar end, to defy those constant laws which have arisen out of our lower and changeless desires, so long as his purpose is unseen, his work must seem frequently in its means and parts displeasing.

Truth is not always readily perceived; and because a painting, at a first glance, appears to disagree with fact, this does not at all mean that it necessarily does so. It is customary to think that because a thing is before our eyes, we therefore see it as it is. We forget that it is only a certain effort of attention that makes clear vision possible: forget that we see without being fully aware of what we see. A connoisseur may travel the globe and remain unacquainted with the accurate form of an oak leaf; yet any casual observer will be prepared to say that a figure is badly drawn without having the slightest knowledge of the laws of anatomy.

But since in art all truths have not the same importance, it is only rare and particular truths which the great artist seeks to transmit. Thus truly great art exhibits the general habits of nature, manifested in some peculiar, rare, and beautiful way.

Since the full perception of truth is an emotional no less than an intellectual apprehension, without profound love for his subject no painter, however great his talent or accomplished his technique, can ever be more than a superior photographer. "To paint mist rightly, space rightly, and light rightly, it may often be necessary to paint nothing else rightly; but the rule is simple for all that: if the artist is painting something that he knows and loves, as he knows it, because he loves it, whether it be the fair strawberry of Cima, or the clear sky of Francia, or the blazing incomprehensible mist of Turner, he is

all right; but the moment he does anything as he thinks it ought to be, because he does not care about it, he is all wrong. He has only to ask himself whether he cares for anything except himself; so far as he does he will make a good picture; so far as he thinks of himself, a vile one."<sup>1</sup>

This conveying of truth is no mere matter of imitation. The simplest phenomenon of nature is quite inimitable. A drawing of the simplest twig could never deceive the experienced eye; nor is it the function of art that it should do so. Thus the painter who regards nature with true candour and tenderness will not give you a faded and feeble image, which may appear to you to be right, because your feelings can detect no discrepancy in its parts, but which he knows to derive its apparent truth from a systemised falsehood. Rather will he make you understand and feel that art *cannot* imitate nature; that where it appears to do so, it only maligns and mocks her. He will give you, or state to you, such truths as are in his power, completely and perfectly; and those which he cannot give, he will leave to your imagination. If you are acquainted with nature, you will know all he has given to be true, and you will supply from your memory and from your heart that light which he cannot give.

For true greatness of mind is not shown by admitting small things, but by making small things great under its influence. He who can take no interest in what is small, will take false interest in what is great; and he who cannot make a bank sublime will only make a mountain ridiculous. The function of the painter is not to draw what he thinks he sees, in an approved manner sanctioned by current taste, but to express the beauty of the visible world in the idiosyncratic manner in which it strikes his experienced and attentive eyes. ". . . If painters would only go out to the nearest dirty pond among the furze, and draw that thoroughly; not considering that it is water that they are drawing, and that water must be done in a certain way, but drawing determinedly what they *see*; that is to say, all the trees, and their shaking leaves, and all the hazy passages of disturbing sunshine; and the bottom seen in the clearer little bits at the edge, and the stones of it, and all the sky, and the clouds far down in the middle, drawn as completely as the real clouds above;—they would come home with such a notion of water-painting as might save me and everyone else all trouble of writing about the matter."<sup>2</sup>

With this the philosophic and theoretic basis of his theme, Ruskin proceeded to demonstrate, by means of penetrating analysis and elaborate detailed comparisons between this picture and that—between one painter and another—that in the realm of truth, and in passionate interpretation, Turner is pre-eminent. Colour, space, skies, clouds, castle, mountains, water and vegetation, all were dis-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 497.

cussed with a knowledge born of skilled, persistent observation and scientific analysis; and in nearly every sphere his finding was that modern painters compared favourably with the often much over-lauded ancient masters, and that of all modern painters, Turner was the greatest.

Ruskin's praise of Turner, indeed, was in places so perfervid that in the ultimate edition of the book some of the most enthusiastic passages of panegyric were omitted. Nevertheless, the final defence of Turner in his first volume of *Modern Painters* is a rhapsody of sonorous praise. "Precisely as we are shallow in our knowledge, vulgar in our feeling, and contracted in our views of principles, will the works of this artist be stumbling blocks or foolishness to us: precisely in the degree in which we are familiar with nature, constant in our observation of her, and enlarged in our understanding of her, will they expand before our eyes into glory and beauty. In every new insight which we obtain into the works of God, in every new idea which we receive from His creation, we shall find ourselves possessed of an interpretation and a guide to something in Turner's work which we had not understood before. We may range over Europe, from shore to shore; and from every rock that we tread upon, every sky that passes over our heads, every local form of vegetation or of soil, we shall receive fresh illustration of his principles, fresh confirmation of his facts. We shall feel, wherever we go, that he has been there before us: and we shall at last cease the investigation, with a well grounded trust, that whatever we have been unable to account for, and what we still dislike in his works, has reason for it, and foundation like the rest; and that even where he has failed or erred, there is a beauty in the failure which none are able to equal, and a dignity in the error which none are worthy to reprove. . . . J. M. W. Turner is the only man who has ever given an entire transcript of the whole system of nature, and is, in this point of view, the only perfect landscape painter whom the world has ever seen."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's urgent advice to artists was to seek to combine the inspiration of truth with perfect ease and efficiency of technique. "The artist who never lets the price command a picture, will soon find the picture command the price. And it ought to be a rule with every painter, never to let a picture leave his easel while it is yet capable of improvement, or of having more thought put into it. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Just as the true function of art is concerned with the "earnest intention of impressing on the spectator some elevated emotion, and exhibiting to him some one particular, but exalting beauty";<sup>3</sup> so the true function of criticism is concerned with interpreting the beauties of a painter to those who, unaided, might not be able to appreciate

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 610-11.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 626-7.

his work. "Our periodical writers, therefore, may save themselves the trouble either of blaming or praising; their duty is not to pronounce opinions upon the work of a man who has walked with nature three-score years; but to impress upon the public the respect with which they are to be received, and to make request to him, on the part of the people of England, that he would now touch no unimportant work, that he would not spend time on slight or small pictures, but give to the nation a series of grand, consistent, systematic and completed poems. . . . He stands upon an eminence, from which he looks back over the universe of God and forward over the generations of men. Let every work of his hand be a history of the one, and a lesson to the other. Let each exertion of his mighty mind be both hymn and prophecy: adoration to the Deity, revelation to mankind."<sup>1</sup>

## 6

Although an edition of only five hundred copies of the first volume of *Modern Painters* was printed, and these sold but slowly, the volume nevertheless launched Ruskin safely into the literary and artistic worlds. Notices did not begin to appear for several months, but the press, on the whole, was distinctly favourable. *The Globe* decided that the work was "the production of one who was profoundly versed in the principles as in the mechanical details of the art"; that it was "evidently the work of a poet as well as of a painter, and one of no common order".<sup>2</sup> *The Spectator* recommended "this able and excellent treatise on landscape painting to all, whether artists or amateurs".<sup>3</sup> *The Artists' and Amateurs' Magazine* decided that, notwithstanding its defects, it was "by far the most intelligent, philosophic and comprehensive work on the subject of Art that had issued from the press of the present day".<sup>4</sup> *Britannia* declared the volume to be "one of the most interesting and important which we have ever seen on the subject, exhibiting a singular insight into the true principles of beauty, order, and taste";<sup>5</sup> and *Fraser's* (nearly three years late) could not "close this article . . . without referring to the singular eloquence and graphic power displayed in very many of its passages".<sup>6</sup>

After such encomiums, copies were called for more rapidly, and a second impression was issued in March 1844. Meanwhile, discerning artists and men of letters had already been impressed. Wordsworth declared that the Graduate of Oxford was a brilliant writer, and placed his copy in the lending library at Rydal Mount. Rogers (now over eighty) conspicuously displayed the volume in his drawing-room, and Tennyson, seeing it there, requested his publisher Moxon to try to

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 629 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *The Globe*, 30 August, 1843.

<sup>3</sup> *Spectator*, 7 December, 1844.

<sup>4</sup> *Artists' and Amateurs' Magazine*, vol. 1, p. 257.

<sup>5</sup> *Britannia*, 9 December, 1843.

<sup>6</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, March 1846, p. 358.

borrow it for him. Miss Mitford recommended it to the Brownings who were in Italy, and already reading it, and learned that Elizabeth found it "very vivid, very graphic, full of sensibility but inconsequent in some of the reasoning, it seemed to me, and rather flashy than full in the metaphysics. Robert, who knows a good deal about art, to which knowledge I of course have no pretence, could agree with him only in snatches. Still . . . for a critic to be so much of a poet is a great thing".<sup>1</sup> While Prout, to whom a copy of the book had been sent by the proud John James, said that he had "read the volume with intense interest, the sentiments and language inviting his attention to every page. But he mourned lest such splendid means of doing eminent service to art should be lost. Had the work been written with the *courteousness* of Sir Joshua Reynolds' lectures, it would have been 'a standard work', the author held in high estimation for his learning and the volume recommended for instruction and usefulness. . . ."<sup>2</sup> As Ruskin had himself told us in *Praeterita*: "Taken as a body, the total group of Modern Painters were . . . more startled than flattered by my schismatic praise; the modest ones, such as Fielding, Prout and Stanfield, felt that it was more than they deserved, —and, moreover, a little beside the mark and out of their way; the conceited ones, such as Harding and de Wint, were angry at the position given to Turner; and I am not sure that any of them were even ready to endorse George Richmond's consoling assurance to my father that I should know better in time."<sup>3</sup>

Gradually the influence of the new critic widened. Charlotte Brontë wrote that "Hitherto she had only had instinct to guide her judgment of art; she felt now as if she had been walking blindfold. This book seemed to give her eyes. . . . Who could read these glowing descriptions of Turner's works without longing to see them? . . ."<sup>4</sup> George Eliot venerated the writer "as one of the great teachers of the day. The grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and solemnity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew Prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way".<sup>5</sup>

And indeed it was. Young Holman Hunt, now a student in the Royal Academy, was lent it by a friend, and sat up reading it all night with unflagging enthusiasm, "feeling as if it had been written expressly for him". "When it had gone, the echo of its words stayed with me, and they gained a further value and meaning whenever my more solemn feelings were touched."<sup>6</sup> Later he tried to com-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Ed. F. G. Kenyon (1897), vol. 1, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, pp. 399-400.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. xlii.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to W. S. Williams, printed in *MacMillan's Magazine*, August 1891.

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Cross, *Life of George Eliot*, vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> W. Holman Hunt, "The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: A Fight for Art", *Contemporary Review*, April 1886.

municate his enthusiasm to his greatest friend, the handsome and wonderfully talented Millais. "He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read," he told him. "He describes pictures of the Venetian School in such a manner that you see them with your inner sight, and you feel that the men who did them had been appointed by God, like old prophets, to bear a second message, and that they delivered themselves like Elijah."<sup>1</sup> But Millais, with the self-confidence of continuous success, was not at all impressed, and declared that he was unlikely to be influenced by anyone.

Over ten years later, Woolner, on his way back from Australia, noted in his log: "Last evening I had a read at Ruskin's first vol. of *Modern Painters* and derived much pleasure from the wisdom of the principles enunciated and the forcible grace of the language they are expressed in. I am convinced the work must do an incalculable amount of good, for it states truths hitherto but dimly understood by many fine artists and totally disregarded by the bulk. I see no evidence of unjust bias in the author, not more than his propositions justify, and I apprehend no man can be too fond of nature and truth. Artists and critics object to this book the same way that unhealthy people object to the physician's injunctions to take exercise and face the pure air of heaven, but if they wish to enjoy long life they must do as they are recommended."<sup>2</sup>

Nor were scholarly and academic minds any less impressed. Liddell (on his way to becoming Dean of Christ Church) considered the book a revelation, and later, when Acland was in despair, advised him to "think less and relax himself more; not to pore over things, and to look at nature and read Ruskin's books".<sup>3</sup> Jowett, the future Master of Balliol, "read it all through with the greatest delight";<sup>4</sup> and in a few years grave young clergymen, like F. W. Robertson, instructed their friends (as later in France young enthusiasts were to do with the novels of Proust) on how best to accustom themselves to the new, exciting and difficult author.—"I rejoice that you have taken up Ruskin; only let me ask you to read it very slowly, to resolve not to finish more than a few pages every day. One or two of the smaller chapters are quite enough—a long chapter is enough for two days, except where it is chiefly made up of illustrations from pictures; those can only be read with minute attention when you have the print or picture to which he refers before you; and those which you can so see . . . you should study with the book, one or two at a time. The book is worth reading in this way: study it—think over each chapter and examine yourself mentally, with shut eyes, upon its principles,

<sup>1</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905), vol. 1, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Woolner, *Thomas Woolner: His Life in Letters* (1917), p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 3, p. 668 n.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters of Jowett* (1897), vol. 1, p. 114.

putting down briefly on paper the heads, and getting up each day the principles that you gained the day before. . . . Do not read it, however, with slavish acquiescence, but with deference, for it deserves it, but not more. And when you have got its principles woven into the memory, hereafter, by comparison and consideration, you will be able to correct and modify for yourself.”<sup>1</sup> Others, like the young George MacDonald, gave it with tender enthusiasm to their betrothed.

At all this John James, of course, was delighted. Soon *Modern Painters* became to him as great a pre-occupation as the sherry business; and in order to encourage and reward his son, he gave him as a New Year’s gift Turner’s magnificent *The Slave Ship*. Ruskin, who later admitted that Turners were one of the two things he had been mad about, took the picture up to his bedroom and placed it at the foot of his bed, so that it should be the first thing he saw when he woke up in the morning.

Even the usually indifferent and taciturn artist himself was not wholly unimpressed. “Called on Turner to-day, who was particularly gracious,” Ruskin recorded a few days after the book’s publication. “I think he must have read my book and been pleased with it, by his tone.”<sup>2</sup> But it was not until 20 October of the following year that the great painter openly acknowledged his gratitude. Ruskin recorded the occasion with characteristic care. “I ought to note my being at Windus’s on Thursday, to dine with Turner and Griffiths alone, and Turner’s thanking me for my book for the first time. We drove home together, and reached his house about one in the morning. Boylike, he said he would give sixpence to find the Harley Street gates shut: but on our reaching his door, vowed he’d be damned if we shouldn’t come in and have some sherry. We were compelled to obey, and so drank healths again exactly as the clock struck one, by the light of a single tallow candle in the under room,—the wine, by-the-bye, first rate.”<sup>3</sup>

## 7

But the reception given to the first volume of *Modern Painters* was by no means wholly eulogious. The *Athenæum* (which reviewed the book twice) likened the Graduate of Oxford to “a whirling Dervish who at the end of his well sustained reel falls with a higher jump and a shriller shriek into a fit”, and enquired “what more light-headed rhodomontade was ever scrawled except upon the walls, or halloed except through the wards, of Bedlam?”<sup>4</sup> Nor did *Blackwood’s*, whose former vituperation had supplied the grain of sand round which the literary pearl had formed, think that the pictorial world, either in

<sup>1</sup> Stopford A. Brooke, *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson* (1874), pp. 302, 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary* (15.5.1843): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xli.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary* (20.10.1844): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xli.

<sup>4</sup> *Athenæum*, nos. 849 and 850, 3 and 10 February, 1844.

taste or practice, would be "Turnerised by this palpably fulsome, nonsensical praise".<sup>1</sup>

Though his father was so sadly affronted by such reverses that Ruskin did his best to prevent adverse notices from reaching his eyes, he himself was only stimulated by such attacks, and gaily noted that he was putting his rod "nicely in pickle for *Blackwood*".<sup>2</sup> John James, who realised that "no man becomes distinguished by making enemies" (as he wrote to the ever sympathetic W. L. Harrison), wished his son only to be "playful, not spiteful, to all opponents". But Ruskin's pickled rod was a formidable weapon, and made him, both now and later, innumerable foes. One of the first lashes of this rod appeared in his preface to the second edition in 1844, and is a fine example of his invective at its most astringent.

"Writers like the present critic of *Blackwood's Magazine*," he wrote in a trenchant article, "deserve . . . the respect due to honest, hopeless, helpless imbecility. There is something exalted in the innocence of their feeble-mindedness, one cannot suspect them of partiality, for it implies feeling; nor of prejudice, for it implies some previous knowledge of the subject. I do not know that, even in this age of charlatanry, I could point to a more barefaced instance of imposture on the simplicity of the public, than the insertion of those pieces of criticism in a respectable periodical. We are not so insulted with opinions on music from persons ignorant of its notes; nor with treatises on philosophy by persons unacquainted with the alphabet; but here is page after page of criticism, which one may read from end to end, looking for something which the writer knows, and finding nothing. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

It was no more than *Blackwood's* deserved; but the tone of the magazine was deliberately hostile to Ruskin, evidently by settled editorial policy, for many years; and they not only had the last word, but even renewed their attacks upon him in their obituary notice fifty-seven years later.

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1843.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary* (29.12.1843): *Works*, vol. 3, p. xliv.

<sup>3</sup> *Modern Painters: Works*, vol. 3, pp. 16-17.



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## Chapter IV

1. *A variety of studies: renewed misgivings about taking orders: social contacts: Monckton-Milnes: Rogers: return to Chamouni.* 2. *Departure for Italy: "George" and Couttet: first stirrings of social conscience: Lucca and the tomb of Ilaria di Caretto: Pisa and the frescoes in the Campo Santo: Florence: Venice with Harding.* 3. *Discovery of Tintoret: fever: experience of prayer.* 4. *The poet "manqué": John James' disappointment.* 5. *The second volume of "Modern Painters": the theoretic faculty: the aesthetic faculty: imagination: true taste: forms of beauty: understanding and emotion: the basis of inspiration.* 6. *Opinions of the work: Miss Mitford's survey: his reputation established.*

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I

NO SOONER had Ruskin completed the first volume of *Modern Painters* than, with characteristic industry, he started preparing notes for the second.

Part of the following summer he spent at Oxford; but no sooner had he returned home than he was once more absorbed completely by his habitual artistic, literary and scientific pursuits. On every possible occasion he continued to gaze intently at the works of Turner. He made careful drawings from leaves and plants, and then augmented his visual knowledge by discovering their botanical names and investigating their hidden mysteries with the aid of a microscope. And together with an old schoolfellow, he designed stained glass windows for a church newly erected in the neighbourhood in the early Decorated style by Gilbert Scott.

But this was not all. Ruskin had one of those rare, profound and original minds which, though analytical, are also comprehensive. Although his approach, even to matters of art, was scientific in method, the departmentalisation, the intense over-specialisation that ultimately leads to expertism on one subject at the expense of understanding of all others, was far from being a danger to him. His own tendency was in the contrary direction. The understanding of one subject was so dependent upon the understanding of another, that the range of his interests was continually widening. It was not enough for him to read the classics in Greek and Latin, Italian and French: it was not enough to study geology, chemistry, mineralogy and comparative anatomy: it was not even enough to study the marbles and the illuminated missals in the British Museum, or to observe the beautiful and delicate sponge-like structure of the common fungus which grows on wet wood; if he wished thoroughly to understand the

earlier schools of Italian painting, then he must make himself fully conversant with the history of the period, the ecclesiastical questions of the time, and the precise religious feelings and beliefs that inspired the great religious paintings he desired to describe.

He had now fully observed that his mind had two important tendencies, "to mystery in what it contemplates, and analysis in what it studies". This discovery he announced in a letter written in March to Osborne Gordon, who had evidently been asking him his intentions with regard to taking holy orders—a project most incompatible with such a mind. "It is externally occupied in watching vapours and splitting straws . . . it has a rooted horror of neat windows and clean walls . . . it is slightly heretical as to the possibility of anybody's being damned . . . it has an inveterate hatred of people who turn up the whites of their eyes (an uncharitable state of feeling towards a pious congregation) . . . dislikes the company of clowns except in pantomimes (an improper feeling towards country squires) . . . likes solitude better than company and stones better than sermons."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the main burden of the letter is, why should he be an evangelical clergyman at all? Surely his present activities are of as great importance to his fellows as would be any sermons from the pulpit? For observe: "I am not engaged in selfish cultivation of critical acumen, but in ardent endeavour to spread the love and knowledge of art among all classes, and secondly, that the love and knowledge I would communicate are not of technicalities and fancies of men, but of the universal system of nature—as interpreted and rendered stable by art. . . ."<sup>2</sup> His innate desire to preach could perfectly well be expressed in the peculiar medium of expression he had himself created; and he had always found sermons in church an intolerable bore. This state of mind must have been a great disappointment to the mother who had dedicated her son to God; but doubtless she countenanced the lapse by thoughts of his uncertain health.

At this time there were also various social distractions, which increased as the identity of the Graduate of Oxford gradually became known. At first it had amused Ruskin to discuss his book with Richmond, who seemed to have no suspicions it could be his; and as the *Athenæum* had regretted that his age was not as green as his judgment, he was more than ever apprehensive lest the work should be known to be by a very young man. Indeed, in sending a copy to his friend, he had observed: "Remember, whatever conjectures, or more than conjectures, you may make in reading it respecting the author are, if you love me, to be kept altogether to yourself—not because I should dislike to be supposed the author (for I think it a mighty clever book) but because my being supposed so would entirely prevent it from having the influence which otherwise, if there be any truth in it,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.3.1844: *Works*, vol. 3, pp. 666-7.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 665.

it might have."<sup>1</sup> But now, after nearly a year, he himself divulged the secret to Prout, who evidently had no more suspicion of the identity of the Graduate than had Richmond.

By now, indeed, Ruskin's book had established for him social relations with some of the most cultured people of the day. On his twenty-fifth birthday, there was another of those intimate little birthday dinners attended by Turner, Prout, George and Thomas Richmond, and W. L. Harrison, which were to continue until 1850. It was at these parties that John James was at his best. There were also occasional visits with his father to Turner, who sometimes, in expansive mood, would invite them to a glass of wine and take them upstairs into his private gallery; of which Ruskin, later, gratefully recorded in his diary how Turner had remembered which was his favourite picture: and, when he had lamented that the worst of their host's pictures was that one could never see enough of them, complacently replied: "That is part of their quality".

Then, dining one day with Acland's friend, Sir Robert Inglis, the Member of Parliament for Oxford, "a man of the highest intellect and goodness" (as Lady Eastlake called him) and an inveterate diner out, he met such celebrities of the day as Lady Davy, Lord Northampton, Lord Arundel, Lord Mahon, Sir J. Franklin, "the North Sea Man", the veteran Rogers, and the fashionable Monckton-Milnes. It seems that the slim, blue-eyed and auburn-haired author of *Modern Painters* was quite a success. Monckton-Milnes (the future Lord Houghton), genial patron of artists and poets, who was even then engaged upon his *Life and Letters of John Keats*, asked him for his card. No sooner had he done so than Rogers, in his high, thin voice, who had probably forgotten all about the youth who had been brought to see him by Pringle years ago, and who had so gauchely omitted to compliment him upon his poems, asked him for another, and invited him to breakfast. Lady Davy (the widow of the inventor) graciously hoped that he would dine at her house one evening before long, and Lord Northampton requested his attendance at a soirée. "I said I would go," Ruskin reported dutifully to John James, "though I don't like soirées; but I thought you would have been vexed if I had refused."<sup>2</sup>

For a young man in the 1840's to be "taken up" by Monckton-Milnes was a great distinction. Poet, politician, philanthropist and traveller; sensitive, genial, garrulous and expansive; generous, hospitable and gifted, Monckton-Milnes, as the sympathetic and influential patron of men of letters, was soon to take the place of the now moribund Rogers. "A Tory Member of Parliament; think of that!" Carlyle had written of him to Emerson in 1840. "For the rest, he describes his religion in these terms: 'I profess to be a Crypto-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 1843: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 36, p. 36.

Catholic.' Conceive the man! A most bland-smiling, semi-quizzical, affectionate, high-bred, Italianised little man, who has long olive-blond hair, a dimple, next to no chin, and flings his arm round your neck when he addresses you in public society."<sup>1</sup>

It was Carlyle too who said of him later that if Christ was again on earth, Milnes would ask him to breakfast, and the clubs would all be talking of the "good things" that Christ had said. "A man very easy to see, and get into flowing talk with," he wrote to Emerson in 1847: "a man of much sharpness of faculty, well tempered by several inches of 'Christian fat' he has upon his ribs for covering. One of the idlest, cheeriest, most gifted of fat little men."<sup>2</sup>

Clubman, exquisite, litterateur, Milnes was equally popular in political, social and literary sets. "That is a young man I should like to know; he looks the best tempered fellow I ever saw,"<sup>3</sup> Tennyson had said to himself, when first he had set eyes on him as an undergraduate at Trinity College; since when the two men had been the firmest friends.

Impressed by Rogers' famous breakfasts, Milnes had very soon acquired the habit of giving similar entertainments of his own; and their brilliant success soon became the talk of the town. "I wonder if Courvoisier (a notorious murderer) was hanged this morning?" someone innocently enquired. "I hope so, or Richard Milnes will have him at his breakfast party next Thursday," a wit replied.<sup>4</sup> Years later, when Milnes was complaining that Peel had given him no post in his new Administration, Carlyle broke in: "Peel knows what he is about; there is only one post fit for you, and that is the office of perpetual president of the Heaven and Hell Amalgamation Society."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, he had a graver side than many gave him credit for: and it is to him that the country is indebted for the establishment of reformatories for juvenile offenders. Women's suffrage, in later life, was another of his interests; and so polished were his after dinner speeches that when, as Lord Houghton, the Prince of Wales once asked him who was the best after-dinner speaker in England, he could reply with courtly suavity: "It rests with you and myself, sir."<sup>6</sup> His wit remained until the end of his life. "I am going over to the majority," he told a friend upon his death bed; "and you know, I have always preferred the minority."<sup>7</sup>

But flattering as it was to be noticed by Monckton-Milnes, it was even more flattering to be noticed by the ancient Rogers. Still a regular diner out and, as Maclise was to say to Frith later at a Royal

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of T. Carlyle and R. W. Emerson* (1885), vol. i, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life, Letters and Friendships of R. Monckton-Milnes* (1890), vol. 1, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 359.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 429.

Academy banquet, when he saw him descend the stairs leaning upon Dickens' arm, "so old that Death seemed to have forgotten him",<sup>1</sup> Rogers still retained a unique position in the literary, artistic and political worlds. Most of his old friends had died; but there were always new ones. A few years later, when Lady Waterford wished to raise money for the starving Irish peasantry, she wrote to her mother: "I have thought of Rogers as a good person to attack for help. Is he not a bachelor and very rich?"<sup>2</sup> Dickens had sent him *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1839, and later requested the "earnest and lasting gratification of dedicating to him *Master Humphrey's Clock*: Thackeray invited himself to breakfast, and then wrote to remind him that "I asked you to ask me, and you asked me on the 30th".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone was now a frequent guest at St. James' Place, the Brownings usually breakfasted there at least once when they visited England; and when, in 1845, Wordsworth was commanded to the Queen's Ball, he went in Rogers' Court dress. Carlyle and his wife have left many brilliant sketches of him during these latter days; varying from a tolerant affection to an incisive distaste. One day he is "still brisk, courteous, kindly affectioned—a good old man, pathetic to look upon":<sup>4</sup> another, he is (for Emerson's benefit) "a grim old Dilettante full of sardonic sense",<sup>5</sup> or "old Rogers, with his pale head, white, bare and cold as snow" who "will work on you with those large blue eyes, cruel, sorrowful, and that sardonic, shelf chin".<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the name of Rogers was still upon the tongue of England's literary, artistic and social worlds. "Did I tell you," Mrs. Browning wrote to Mrs. Martin in December, 1844, "that Rogers the poet, at eighty-three or four years of age, bore the bank robbery with the light-hearted bearing of a man 'young and bold', went out to dinner two or three times the same week, and said witty things at his own griefs. One of the other partners went to bed instead, and was not likely, I heard, to 'get over it'. I felt quite glad for Rogers. He was in Germany last year, and this summer in Paris, but he first went to see Wordsworth at the Lakes." And as late as 1849 Lady Eastlake recorded that "my breakfast at Mr. Rogers' on Wednesday was delightful. Whether it is that he is peculiarly kind to me on my husband's account, or whether his temper has softened with age I know not; but he certainly seems most amiable and affectionate".<sup>7</sup>

And now, as if to atone for past errors, the young Ruskin seems to have attached himself to him with much the same deference that later the young Proust attached himself to the celebrated Comte

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (1887), vol. 1, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> A. T. C. Hare, *The Story of Two Noble Lives* (1893), vol. 1, p. 303.

<sup>3</sup> P. W. Clayden, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London* (1884), vol. 1, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>7</sup> C. E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, vol. 1, p. 234.

Robert de Montesquiou. The following summer, before he went abroad, he concluded an exceedingly gracious letter with the flattering words: "I cannot set off for Italy without thanking you again and again for all that, before I knew you, I had learned from you, and you know not how much (of that little I know) it is, and for all that you *first* taught me to feel in the places I am going to."<sup>1</sup>

Once more Ruskin had desired to go to his beloved Chamouni. In order that he could study stained glass at the same time, he and his parents journeyed by Rouen, Chartres, Auxerre and Geneva (where they engaged for the first time that sage, intelligent and benevolent guide Couttet, who was to remain Ruskin's valued friend for many years); and in order that he could study Titian and Veronese in the Louvre, they stayed in Paris on the way back. Once more, in Switzerland, Ruskin felt God's hand upon the mountains, and, in intervals between sketching, noted the sun's image reflected from a bank of cloud above the horizon, after it had set, so vivid that, had he not watched the sun sink down, he would have taken it for the sun itself: the hills which he found more lovely every day, so that it seemed he could never cease looking at them: or the blinding beauty of the summer moon, which suddenly burst forth into the sky like a vast star. "For an hour before, the aiguilles had appeared as dark masses against a sky looking so transparent as clear sea, edged at their summits with fleeces of cloud breaking into glorious spray and foam of white fire."<sup>2</sup>

During the autumn, at home, he began a serious study of Fra Angelico, and paid frequent visits to the British Museum to look at the Elgin Marbles.

## 2

"The multiplicity of subject and opposite directions of investigation, which have so often been alleged against me, as if sources of weakness, are in reality, as the multiplied buttresses of the apse of Amiens, as secure in allied result as they are opposed in direction." So wrote Ruskin in a letter to the press in 1850, with the frank self-knowledge that is the possession of most great men. And now, in the complex but complementary researches which he continued to pursue, he began to discover that increased knowledge is but the gauge of ignorance, and to repent the rashness with which he had embarked upon lavish criticism of the ancient masters when, in fact, his knowledge of their works was all but restricted to a few examples he had seen in English galleries and private collections. As the winter passed and spring drew on it became ever more apparent to him that he could never hope successfully to complete his work until he knew a great deal more about primitive Christian Art than he did at

<sup>1</sup> Letter of March (?) 1845: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary* (28.6.1844): *Works*, vol. 35, p. 330.

present. Reading up a subject was all very well; but as admirers of his own books were soon to realise, there is little to be gained by pursuing elaborate descriptions of specific paintings unless those paintings are actually before one's eyes.

Thus he realised the necessity of making another long visit to Italy, unencumbered by ill-health, and disembarrassed, if possible, of the continual presence of his family. It was an ambition that had evidently been simmering inside him for many months; for as far back as the previous August he had written to George Richmond from Paris: "I want to go to Italy again—I want to go everywhere at any time, and be in twenty places at once. All that I do in Switzerland only opens a thousand new fields to me, and I have more to see now than when I went."<sup>1</sup> Persuasive eloquence on his part, and the impossibility of his father leaving his business for over half a year without any specific excuse, evidently made this possible.

On 2 April, 1845, therefore, Ruskin set off alone on a tour of Switzerland and Italy which lasted over seven months. This time he travelled by Beauvais, Paris, Sens, Dijon, Champagnole and Geneva, traversed Low Savoy and Provence to Fréjus, and thence took the beautiful coast road of the two Riviéras, until, at Massa, he followed the southern valleys of the Carrara Hills on the route to Lucca. His parents (despite the fact that he had already celebrated his twenty-sixth birthday) were in a great state of anxiety about his departure—"There'll be such a fidge about you," said the faintly disgruntled Turner, "when you are gone," laying a gripping hand upon Ruskin's arm.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, whenever the subject was proposed, Turner had always tried to dissuade him from the venture; and Ruskin afterwards believed that his going stamped him in the painter's eyes as being selfish and unfeeling, and that he took no further interest in him on that account.

John James, as usual, made his son free with his own purse; but, with characteristic caution, he liked to know how every penny was spent, so that once Ruskin had wasted over two hours in trying to account for a shortage of thirty francs, he decided that calculation was not one of his gifts, and delegated the irksome duty to his guide. Later Ruskin was to write that he resembled St. Jerome with this terrible difference, that while he left, for his studies in the desert, Roman luxury far away, he always carried it with him, as well as his books; and that *his* chosen kind of desert was—the Hotel de Bellevue at Thun, or the Cascade at the Giessbach, with comfortable rooms always ordered, and a three course dinner ready at four o'clock.

One evening in Switzerland, he experienced the first stirrings of the social conscience that was ultimately to dominate his whole life. For Ruskin's long adolescence was not only the long adolescence of genius:

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 12.8.1844: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterea: Works*, vol. 35, p. 342.

it was the long adolescence of one whose peculiar circumstances had immured him from all the sordid aspects of contemporary life as thoroughly as if he had been a girl. If he saw picturesque poverty during his travels, he certainly saw none at home; and it never seems to have occurred to him until now that all men might not be as fortunate as himself. About a week after he had set out, there was a remarkable evening when, arrived after a pleasant journey at a charming inn, the genial hosts with their own hands served him a perfect dinner. There was fried trout, freshly caught and of delicious flavour: there was roast woodcock on toast, there was a perfectly cooked soufflé. Partly to perfect the meal, and partly for the benefit of the house, he ordered himself a modest half bottle of wine. It was as delicious as the food. With the palate of the gourmet, he ate his woodcock, savoured his *Sillery mousseux*, and thought of Horace and Rogers, and the host of poets who have sung the delicate joys of life. Thus brooding, he saw the contents of his glass suddenly turn rose, and realised that the sun was setting in a blaze of splendour. Jumping up, he watched the sky for a long time; until all colour had faded from its luminous expanse. Then he went back and finished off his wine, possessed by a sudden melancholy realisation that very few mortals were granted such enjoyments, and wondering whether he had any right to be so distinguished.

The mood did not persist, but it was to recur with an ever deepening power. Meanwhile, he had recaptured all his old ardent delight in nature, and his letters home are full of youthful enthusiasm. "I had such another glorious drive to-day—as never was!—by the shores of the lake of Annecy. Such a lovely shore—all walnuts and chestnuts, with ivy up the trunks and primroses and cowslips all over the roots, and sweet winding English-like lanes all about and among them, with bits of wooden farms and cottages here and there, all covered with trellises for vines, as well as some of the road, and even of the lake; for they actually build their trellises far out into or over the water, so as to form a sort of vinous boat-house, and the meadows slope up in the softest possible curves to the crags, steeper and steeper until out comes the rock, and up go the mountains six or seven hundred feet. You must positively come here next summer."<sup>1</sup>

In excellent health, and with all the anxieties of the last Italian tour at rest, Italy was now a revelation to him; and a revelation that, with the passion of the artist, he felt himself dedicated to realise and to communicate. His especial delight was kindled first at Lucca: Lucca where the hills were "as high as they should be, rivers as wide, pictures as pretty, and masters and men as wise—as pretty and wise could be". Here he settled himself down to work for a week and a half; but the enchantment was to last for forty years. "You cannot conceive what a divine country this is now," he wrote to his father on

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 15.4.1845: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 41.



3 May. "The vines with their young leaves hang as if they were of thin beaten gold—everywhere—the bright green of the young corn sets off the grey purple of the olive hills, and the spring skies have been every one backgrounds of Fra Angelico."<sup>1</sup> Frescoes, churches and, in the Cathedral, the perfect tomb of Ilaria di Caretto by Jacopo de Lucrezia, were a continual source of wonder and delight. His days were apportioned out, as usual, to various different important tasks. At six o'clock he was up, by seven he was reading his Sismondi over a breakfast of coffee and eggs, at eight he would set out with history book and drawing block to some old Lombard church, so rich in frescoes and mosaics that it seemed he could never record them all, and so deserted that he could work uninterrupted even during Mass. At noon he closed his books and set out to study neighbouring churches which, now that Mass was over, were free for a laborious inspection. So spontaneous was his enthusiasm, so gentle and winning his manner, so infectious his delight, that in San Romano, the church of the Dominicans, the monks would bring him steps and candles from the altar so that he could study the deep tone and colour of the Fra Bartolommeo, which he later called the first example of accomplished sacred art he had seen since his recent initiation into Turnerian truths. When he had gazed his fill, he would then pay a visit to a friendly sacristan at the Duomo—one of those well-tipped, fascinated sacristans that were to remember him until their death, and speak of him with deep veneration to later travellers—who would read him obscure Latin inscriptions, and point out strange emblems of decoration upon the walls, the significance of each of which he delightedly explained, happy to have so eager and so instructed a listener. Two hours of such study, and it was time for dinner. But dinner did not occupy him long, and at three o'clock he was off again, to draw, with tender care, the magnificent façade of San Michele. For two and a half hours he would work, happy and absorbed, until George took charge of all his trappings, and he sauntered off to the ramparts to gaze at the distant mountain peaks empurpled by the setting sun, or clambered up to spend the last of the daylight hours upon the roof of Santa Maria della Spina.

At Pisa, the next place where he stopped, his greatest enthusiasm was for the frescoes in the Campo Santo. "The Campo Santo is the thing," he wrote to his father on 18 May. "I never believed the patriarchal history before, but I do now, for I have seen it. You cannot conceive the vividness and fullness of conception of these great old men. . . . Abraham and Adam and Cain, Rachel and Rebekah, are all there, real, visible, created, substantial, such as they were, as they must have been; one cannot look at them without being certain they have lived. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Here, indeed, he found "the entire

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 3.5.1845: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 43-4.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 18.5.1845: *Works*, vol. 4, p. xxxi.

doctrine of Christianity so painted that a child could understand it, and thought for the first time the relations that might truly exist between God and His creatures". His appreciation was rendered even keener by a rising element of foreboding and anxiety. For here, where he was at work by five o'clock making detailed drawings of the frescoes—those frescoes which, in the engravings of Lasimo, were three years later to stimulate a group of talented and ardent young men into the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—as workmen, while putting up some superfluous monument to a local apothecary, heedlessly plastered over half a yard of decorated border, and wantonly destroyed, with reckless hammering, the fast perishing head of Antonio Veneziano. It was not the first example he had seen of the bestial indifference of modern Italians to the unparalleled beauties of their works of art, but it aroused him to a passionate despair. "I do believe," he wrote to his father that night, "that I shall live to see the ruin of everything good and great in the world and have nothing left to hope for but the fires of judgment to shrivel up the cursed idiocy of mankind. Two frescoes of Giotto torn away at one blow to put up a black pyramid,"<sup>1</sup> was his outraged cry. As for "poor little Santa Maria della Spina, they want to pull it down to widen the quay; but, as they say in *King Lear*, 'That's but a trifle here'."<sup>2</sup>

When he arrived at Florence, so anxious was he to make his records, that he was up and at work at five o'clock in the morning, gazing, in rapt delight, at the Cimabue Madonna in Santa Maria Novella; examining with punctilious care the great chapel with the magnificent, crowded Orcagna paintings of the Last Judgment; at the roof and the fourteen vast, untouched frescoes of Domenico Ghirlandaio, at the tomb of Filippo Strozzi—the Crucifixion of Giotto; and the perfectly preserved works of Fra Angelico, which afforded him immeasurable delight, and of which he wrote home that the centre of one of them was as near heaven as human hand or mind will ever go. But here the restorations annoyed him more than the lapses into decay. "You will ask what I would have, if I would neither have repairs nor have things ruined," he wrote to his father on 17 June. "This I would have: Let them take the greatest possible care of all they have got, and when care will preserve it no longer, let it perish inch by inch rather than retouch it."<sup>3</sup>

For two months he lived in a frenzy of activity in the Ghirlandaio chapel of Santa Maria Novella; in the Brancacci chapel on the work of Masaccio and Lippi; and on the Angelicos in St. Mark's Convent. "Architecture, sculpture, anatomy, botany, music, all" must be thought of and in some degree touched upon," he wrote home, "and one is always obliged to stop in the middle of one thing to take note

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 13.5.1845: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 17.6.1845: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 49.

of another. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Revelation followed revelation. No sooner had he become used to the beauties of one painter than he was struck by the excellence of another. The Crucifixion of Giotto, in particular, filled him with awe, and he began an intensive study of that master. He climbed up ladders with candles in his hands, charmed sacristans into helping him erect scaffolding, and gazed and commented both in sketches and in words. Then, when he required exercise, he would make hay on the hill of Fiesole in a monastery garden with some monks with whom he was on friendly terms, or sketch happily for hours in the open air.

When the heat became intolerable, with innumerable payments at toll-gates and showing of passports he moved across the Apennines, staying first at Parma, and then at Macugnaga, with an untroubled peace about him and the snows of Monte Rosa brilliant in the transparent air. Here, living in a log cabin so small that he could not even stretch without taking the skin off his knuckles, he spent long days finding the scenes which had inspired some of Turner's recent drawings, and long evenings reading the plays of Shakespeare, his only companions, besides Couttet and George, being (as he wrote to Clayton) the cows and goats on the hillside, a black puppy, and some sociable moths who came in the evenings and put his candle out.

Presently he received a letter from his drawing master, Harding, suggesting that he should join him for a sketching holiday; and delighted at the prospect of an agreeable companion, Ruskin agreed to meet him at Baveno. From here they drove in brilliant sun and splendid spirits by Como, Bergamo, Desenzano and Verona to Venice, stopping when they felt inclined, to sketch by the wayside, each full of good-humoured censure for the stylistic foibles of the other.

At Venice they continued to sketch with unflagging energy. Up and out by six o'clock, they moored their gondola amongst the boats in the fruit market; and, after their meal, attached themselves to the stern of a fishing boat owned by some friendly natives, "sailing as the wind served, within or outside the Lido, and sketching the boat and her sails in their varied action—or Venice, as she shone far away beyond her islands."<sup>2</sup>

Nor were they without other congenial society, for William Boxall, R.A., and Mrs. Jameson, who was gathering material for her *Sacred and Legendary Art*, were both then in Venice, and there were many meetings and agreeable walks. Sometimes, too, Ruskin and his master explored together some of the old, neglected churches; lingering in the dark cloisters of St. Mark, where his favourite Fra Angelicos looked down from the walls like visions, and the treasures of the old sacristies were lighted with a glow from rich stained glass that was

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.6.1845: *Works*, vol. 4, p. xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Præterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 373.

"like the blood of kings and queens". Thus he discovered one day, quite unexpectedly, the mighty genius of Tintoret.

## 3

"I have been quite overwhelmed to-day by a man whom I never dreamed of—Tintoret," he wrote to his father on 23 September. "I always thought him a good and clever and forcible painter; but I had not the smallest notion of his enormous powers. It is marvellously lucky I came here, or I might have disgraced myself forever by speaking slightly of Tintoret. I look upon Tintoret now, though as a less perfect painter, yet as a far greater man than Titian ipse." He is "at the top-top-top of everything; with a great big black line underneath him to stop him off from everybody, and put him in the school of Intellect, next after Michael Angelo".<sup>1</sup>

Later, in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, he wrote that he had seen that day the Art of Man in its full majesty for the first time, and thanks to the strange and precious personal gift which enabled him to recognise it, it ennobled, instead of crushed him by its mightiness.

But Tintoret was not Ruskin's only discovery during this visit to Italy. It was to be one of the charming, if disconcerting, features of his nature until the day he died that, so grateful was he for any spark of originality or talent in his contemporaries, he would ardently praise some unknown and gifted amateur with the same delight that he would evince for a recognised master. Only a few months before he had written to George Richmond from Florence, recommending to his professional attention a Mrs. Shuttleworth who was seeking a drawing master for her daughter, "the most wonderful creature that ever touched pencil, I think, and if you don't think so too, I shall be disappointed. . . . I am terrified lest they should spoil her, and so I thought it best to refer to you at once".<sup>2</sup>

Soon the excitement of continual activity and the unusual heat had disastrous results. When Harding left him to return to Rome, despite the advice of Couttet, he worked so long in the Scuola di San Rocco making copies of the Tintorets and writing comments on works of art for Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy* that it soon began to tell upon his health; and on his journey homeward, he was afflicted with mounting temperature and an incessant irritation in the throat, which indicated a possible recurrence of serious illness. Very understandably, this engendered a mood of deep depression, and called to mind past haemorrhages and long weeks confined to his room when he dared not stir for fear of another issue of blood, and this depression was deepened by receiving news that one of his

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 23.9.1845: *Works*, vol. 4, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 4.6.1845: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 46.

cousins had died. Exhausted and in despair, he decided to pray unceasingly, and thus, by mental devotion, raised himself to a state in which it seemed to him that divine knowledge had been vouchsafed to him that his present illness was but a temporary state that would soon pass. Happy and exalted, it reaffirmed his abeyant belief in the possibility of direct communication with God: but like all such experiences, it could not last, and no sooner had he reached home and the excited embrace of his parents than he "sank back into the faintness and darkness of the underworld".<sup>1</sup>

## 4

The splendid new impressions of Italy, which now made it possible for him to settle down with renewed diligence to the composition of the second volume of *Modern Painters* were not the only thing that remained to him from this summer tour. Perhaps even more important was the melancholy and chastening realisation that, after nearly twenty years of effort and conviction, it was not his fate to be a poet. For some time the realisation had been growing upon him, but hitherto he had evaded it to please John James, who was always convinced that to be a second Byron was his appointed *métier*; and continually stimulated him to fresh efforts. The curious and macabre Scythian songs, with their easy phrasing and swinging rhythms, had seemed to the still infatuated father the quintessence of his son's achievements. But in his own heart, Ruskin knew better. The poetic vision was his; of that there was no doubt; but more and more it had become evident that for him writing verses merely distorted meaning and vanquished inspiration. The greater became his ease at expressing himself in prose, the deeper grew the realisation. Apparently Mrs. Ruskin, with sturdy commonsense, had seen already that some of John's prose passages were of far greater value than anything he wrote in rhyme; but John James, who had set his heart upon the unattainable, was sadly discouraged. "I wish," he wrote to Harrison, "that his mother may not be right after all, and our son prove but a poet in prose after all."<sup>2</sup> A few months before, while he was at Parma, his father had written to him his disappointment at some verses he had, according to his custom, dutifully included in his letter home, and praised at their expense the most morbid and artificial of his earlier productions. "The *Scythian Banquet Song*, which you think little of, was the greatest of all your poetical productions. All the Herodotean pieces show real power, and have a spice of the devil in them."<sup>3</sup> To this Ruskin had replied with characteristic insight: "The life I lead is far too comfortable and regular, too hardening. I see

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 16.7.1845: *Works*, vol. 2, pp. xxviii-xxix.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 26.6.1845: *Works*, vol. 4, p. xxxiii.

nothing of human life but wasters, dogoniers and beggars. I get into no scrapes, suffer no inconveniences, and am subject to no species of excitement except that arising from art, which I conceive to be too abstract in its nature to become productive of poetry, unless combined with experience of living passion. I don't see how it is possible for a person who gets up at four, goes to bed at ten, eats ices when he is hot, and beef when he is hungry, gets rid of all claims of charity by giving money which he hasn't earned, and those of compassion by treating all distresses more as picturesque than as real: I don't see how it is at all possible for such a person to write good poetry. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

And now he fully realised that whatever it was he felt himself impelled from the depths of his being to express, it could never be communicated in artificial measure. His verses might deceive the uninstructed, but they could deceive no true poet: and, true poet that he was, he was not deceived. He wanted to be something more than a second-rate poet: and he knew now that he could never be a first-rate one. As he wrote later in *The Cestus of Aglaia*, "in all the arts, the difference between the all but finest and the finest is infinite", and in *Modern Painters*, "with second-rate poetry in quality no one ought to be allowed to trouble mankind".

After his long period of apprenticeship, he was but a *poète manqué*; and, as he wrote to a friend years later: "I would rather be a first-rate shoemaker than a second-rate poet." It was a profound disillusionment to a man of unbounded ambition—and the first of many. But it was a disillusionment that eventually brought with it peace of mind; particularly when he realised that it was only such rigorous and disciplined training which had given him his powerful mastery of sonorous phrase and pungent epithet.

After his return from Italy in 1845, save for a few odd songs written on special occasions to gratify his friends, he never wrote a poem again.

But nothing would induce John James to realise the truth, and he still nursed fond projects of issuing a volume of Ruskin's poetical works. When these seemed hopeless, his desires were even more pathetic. Eighteen months later, he imparted to Harrison his longing to make a selection of "all the best he had ever penned; in fact, to be merely called *Poems, etc., printed but not published by J.R.* They are worth collecting for a family Record, and the expense would not be great, if I could get his own consent, but I believe I should have both him and his Mama against the project".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless he could not rest until he had had his own way: and in 1850 he issued a private edition of fifty copies, some of which Ruskin destroyed afterwards with his own hands. As we shall see later, the ill-timed presentation of these to various friends was to cause his son extreme vexation.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.7.1845: *ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 16.7.1845: *Works*, vol. 2, pp. xxviii-xxix.

"Art, properly so called, is no recreation; it cannot be learned at spare moments, nor be pursued when we have nothing better to do. It is no handiwork for drawing-room tables, no relief of the ennui of boudoirs; it must be understood or undertaken seriously, or not at all."<sup>1</sup> To a generation which believed that the function of art was to "make pretty things", this vital message from the new apostle had a ring as stern as it was surprising. For sterile as he might be as a poet, Ruskin's powerful expressive gift was soon to raise art criticism on to an entirely new level of significance.

The second volume of *Modern Painters*, written while Ruskin was under the too-powerful influence of Hooker, is, in style, one of the most florid of all his works. It is erected upon an elaboration of the same metaphysical basis expounded in his previous book; and therefore to those who consider art merely a luxury, or an adornment to wealth, it has nothing to say.

To Ruskin, art is the flower of life. Its genesis and its creation both demand the utmost in capacity and accomplishment of which a man is capable. It is the spontaneous and necessary expression, both of his instinctive joy in life, and of his gratitude to the Creator. Poets and mystics have always expressed the inseparable emotions of gratitude and wonder that come from a heightened perception of the natural world—and it is these emotions, in one form or another, that true art always seeks to express.

The faculty in man which contemplates the natural world, not for any utilitarian or ulterior purpose, but for the conscious perception and appreciation of beauty, is his noblest gift, exercising the highest moral capacities of which he is capable. This faculty Ruskin elects to call the theoretic faculty: the aesthetic faculty, in his nomenclature, meaning simply that which gives an indiscriminate and involuntary pleasure in objects which do not particularly conduce to an elevated state of mind. The exercise of the theoretic faculty, being always deliberate and conscious, implies the only true basis for poetic and artistic activity. But while it is the theoretic faculty that gives the inspiration for art, it is the imagination alone which determines its structure.

Here it is necessary to understand that, for Ruskin, imagination is not that faculty in man which incessantly produces involuntary dreams: but the rare function which is able, not only instantaneously to perceive truth in the natural world, but also, by some mysterious process, to transmute such truth simultaneously into an artistic equivalent by which it can be communicated accurately to other receptive and sympathetic minds. True, imagination can add nothing to truth; but it can communicate and interpret truth.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 4, p. 26.

The aesthetic faculty, which, etymologically, means that which perceives the external world by means of the senses, is not a true artistic faculty. For the artist's vision, though received through the senses, is recorded upon tablets of a special sensitivity—a sensitivity which is the result of a rare consciousness in which mind and heart are co-ordinated in a heightened awareness which contemplates and comprehends beauty as that supersubstantial bread without which the spirit of man must starve; and perceives the creature, the creator, and the whole created world in their true and inseparable relation to each other. It is for this reason that, for Ruskin, art is inseparably connected with morality, in the sense of implicit discrimination: discrimination not only between the quality of impressions, but also between the sources of impressions.

Thus the immeasurable superiority of the theoretic to the aesthetic faculty. Not that sense perception, as such, is in any way to be despised: but only sense perception divorced from all discrimination and remote from a proper sense of creaturely gratitude. The aesthetic faculty, when working alone, is merely neutral. It is only when there are added to it joy, admiration, love, and gratitude to a superior intelligence, that impressions can be perceived with the conscious and emotional intensity necessary for the inspiration and creation of art.

This discrimination inevitably involved in the theoretic faculty is one of degree rather than of will. We cannot control our immediate impressions; we cannot see blue when red is before us simply because we happen to prefer it: but we can deliberately attune ourselves to receive impressions with a higher intensity, and should do so if only because we have this power. The duty involved, in fact, is to raise the senses to that state in which they shall perceive the external world with the maximum of truth; a condition which not only involves the greatest possible sensibility and judgment, but a right relationship to life.

The deliberate cultivation of the senses to the formation of true taste involves a long discipline of the attention, and accurate knowledge of beauty is attained only by the degree of earnestness, love and selflessness with which we receive impressions. This implies an immediate distrust of all fashion, which finds beauty as the result of habit rather than of spontaneous reaction. True taste "cannot be cramped in its conclusions by partialities and hypocrisies: its visions and its delights are too penetrating, too living, for any whitewashed object or shallow fountain long to endure or supply. It clasps all that it loves so hard, that it crushes it if it be hollow".<sup>1</sup>

Above all, the discrimination of true taste is no mere fastidiousness. Rather, the greater the cultivation, the greater the catholicity. It is only fashion that seeks satisfaction in apparent splendour and specific tricks of style. True taste pierces to the truth, and finds beauty every-

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters: Works*, vol. 4, p. 59.



where. Beauty, to those who have learnt to see, is to be "felt and found in every human heart and countenance,—to be loved in every roadside weed and moss-grown wall".<sup>1</sup> For which reason the true painter can express himself in any subject, and it is only the second-rate who are forever occupied with choice of material.

But although apprehended in the faculty of perception, true beauty has also an external origin, its source existing in the external form and quality of bodies, from a stone to man. There is Typical beauty, which is the beauty of intrinsic form; and there is Vital beauty, expressed by the perfect functioning of living things; and, in particular, in the perfect life of man. To identify beauty with truth, utility, habit, or the association of ideas is in each case equally erroneous. A stone is as much an expression of truth as a rose: but only rarely is it as beautiful. Hunger is more materially useful to the living organism than admiration, and lust than love; but neither is as beautiful. Familiarity can deaden impressions, just as it can endear an object to the affections. But though it can still the horror of the repulsive, it can neither create nor destroy the essence of beauty in a thing. A skull may cease to become an emblem of mortality, but it can never become as beautiful as a child's lovely face: and the memory which imbues the associated objects of a particular experience with peculiar beauty is merely accidental.

The one essential quality in the perception of beauty is, in fact, intensity of emotion. "The keenness of our vision is to be tested by the expansiveness of our love."<sup>2</sup> This will be immediately understood by anyone who can recollect his response to Nature in early childhood; or appreciates the attitude of Wordsworth, whose poetry Ruskin obviously read with deep attention, and whose experiences he often expresses in different terms.

With this theme as his basis, Ruskin then discusses, with characteristic detailed and elaborate discursiveness, the various attributes of typical and of vital beauty, and discovers that great art is concerned either with the direct representation, or the imaginative transmutation, of truth, while bad art is neither truly imaginative nor even accurate in representation.

Obviously before truth can be painted, its principles must be understood: so that it is the business of the painter not only to comprehend to the maximum of his ability the various laws which govern the whole created world, but to penetrate to the ideal which exists always beneath appearances of that which is immediately seen. Here again, understanding can only be the resultant of a peculiar emotion; and who comprehends in the chill light of intellect alone, realises nothing. Only to the impersonal and uncorrupted vision is truth revealed undistorted and undefiled. The greatest works have always

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.



VII. R. MONCKTON-MILNES



VIII. COVENTRY PATMORE

*From medallion by T. Woolner, R.A., 1849*



EMILY AUGUSTA PATMORE

*From a portrait by Sir J. E. Millais, P.R.A., 1851*

been created through a simple act of love. To fail to understand this, to believe that any man's work can be greater than the being of the man himself, is to misunderstand completely both the significance and the function of art. And it is precisely this misunderstanding which has led to the decadence of art in the Christian world.

## 6

Ruskin had returned home early in November 1845; and practically the whole of the autumn and winter was devoted to the composition of the second volume of his book, which was published on 24 April of the following year. "Flowers of Billingsgate, kennel water and eructations of idle wind" were some of the phrases hurled upon it by that august journal, the *Athenæum*.<sup>1</sup> But on the whole the reviews were, as Ruskin was to remark later, either "cautious or complimentary".<sup>2</sup>

Only a week after its publication, the *English Gentleman* declared that "the more one reads the book the more it fascinates",<sup>3</sup> and found the clearness of style and perception to be like Bacon, the religious eloquence like Jeremy Taylor, but the metaphysical basis for art criticism entirely the author's own. These "together with the fund of deep observation and practical knowledge which the book displays, render it one of the most original and remarkable productions of what, till the author's views prevail", must still be called aesthetic criticism. A fortnight later the *Weekly Chronicle* found that it was "a real delight in this age of commercialism and utilitarianism to meet with a man who talks of nature with the love he does, and who can defend so chivalrously the spiritual against the material,—the imponderable beauties of creation against those gross realities which everywhere so much prevail".<sup>4</sup> While the *North British Review* announced it to be "a very extraordinary and a very delightful book, full of truth and goodness, of power and beauty"—a work "that opened new doors into heaven, brought the country into the town, made the invisible seen, the distance near".<sup>5</sup> As for the *Church of England Quarterly Review* for July, whose reviewer had seen some of Ruskin's drawings exhibited at the Graphic Society, and heard a famous Academician exclaim that "the man who can draw like that may write anything he pleases upon art"—it announced that his book was "one of the most marvellous productions of modern times".<sup>6</sup> At the age of twenty-seven, in the art and literary worlds, Ruskin had established his reputation.

<sup>1</sup> *Athenæum*, no. 978, 25 July, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. 421.

<sup>3</sup> *English Gentleman*, 2 May, 1846.

<sup>4</sup> *Weekly Chronicle*, 16 May, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> *North British Review*, February 1847.

<sup>6</sup> *Church of England Quarterly Review*, July 1846.

But although the more contemptuous outcries against the first volume were effectively silenced; although the distinguished Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh wrote the author a charming letter of appreciation, which began a friendship between them that was to last for many years, Ruskin was already aware of some of his book's defects. In later years, he often rebuked himself for the affectations of his style, too reminiscent, in many passages, of the elaborate sonorities of Hooker; and found it intensely disagreeable to consider the intolerance and narrow sectarianism of many of the religious views expressed.

His second volume of *Modern Painters*, despite the fact that Ruskin was to complain later it was read only for its pretty passages and never caused the purchase of one good Tintoret for the National Gallery, not only established the reputation of its author amongst the small circle who alone matter in such things; not only caused a great revaluation in the public mind in the works of Turner, the prices of whose pictures were to rise steadily for a great number of years, but it also re-established the reputation of Tintoret, who, although admired by Lawrence and by Turner, was far from being generally appreciated at his true worth; and was largely instrumental in influencing the acquisition of early Italian paintings by the National Gallery.

Nevertheless, there was to be an interval of ten years before Ruskin published the following parts of his greatest work. During that time his culture deepened and his appreciations steadily widened, so that even although presently he appeared to have abandoned painting as a subject, for his earlier love of architecture; when he did return to the conclusion of the magnificent task he had set himself, it was with a vastly enriched experience and a widely extended understanding.

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## Book III

### The Fair Maid of Perth 1848-1854

*When the make of the creature is fine, its temptations are strong, as well as its perceptions; it is liable to all kinds of impressions from without in their most violent form; liable therefore to be abused and hurt by all kinds of rough things which would do a coarser creature little harm, and thus to fall into frightful wrong if its fate will have it so.*

RUSKIN: *Modern Painters*, Vol. 5.

*People are always the same. You can't alter natures. . . . I can never alter myself. I think I had better make the best of myself as I am.*

RUSKIN: Letter to Octavia Hill.

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## Chapter I

1. *Holiday in Switzerland: rift with his father: dinners with Lady Davy: Charlotte Lockhart: melancholy: Oxford: Dr. Jephson: the futility of life: Crossmount: the solace of manual labour: "prison shades".* 2. *Visit to the Grays: he proposes to Effie: doubts and misgivings: departure for Scotland.*

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I  
NO SOONER had Ruskin seen the second volume of *Modern Painters* through the press, than he set out once more with his parents to recuperate from his labours on a protracted tour abroad. They crossed the channel on 2 April, and did not return to Denmark Hill until 6 October, journeying at leisure, through France and Switzerland to Italy, stopping for a week or a fortnight where and when they felt inclined, and returning by way of Chamouni where Acland was on his honeymoon. The main object of the holiday had been that Ruskin should share with his parents the delight with which he had made his artistic discoveries of the previous year; but in this it was a pathetic failure. The sympathy which linked father and son together had already lost much of its former power, and there were moments of tension, irritation, and disappointment on both sides. For the first time, in fact, it became apparent to Ruskin that his father was an

elderly man whose views and tastes were already deeply fixed in the psychological ruts of habit, and that to expect him to enthuse over striped blank walls and saints with oval Chinese eyes was merely ridiculous. Yet the more indifferent his father seemed to all that he now admired, the more firmly Ruskin entrenched himself in all his newest tastes and opinions, and inwardly rebelled against every suggested restraint imposed upon the expression of his views.

Once back at Denmark Hill he found himself once more a considerable figure of interest in the literary and social worlds. He became acquainted with Mary Russell Mitford, who found him, as she wrote to a friend, "certainly the most charming person I have ever known, by far the most eloquent and interesting young man that I have ever seen, grace itself and sweetness",<sup>1</sup> and "just what, if one had a son, one should have dreamt of his turning out, in mind, manner, conversation, everything . . .",<sup>2</sup> and to whom Ruskin, in her declining years of invalidism and poverty, showed every manner of affectionate attention; and was often to be seen at Rogers', and no less often at Lady Davy's, the widow of Sir Humphrey Davy, whose literary parties in Park Street, where "there usually gathered, with others, the literary and scientific men who had once known Abbotsford",<sup>3</sup> vied in brilliance with those of Lady Ashburton at Bath House. As a lion hunter, indeed, Lady Davy seems to have enjoyed a singular success. Two years later, Lady Eastlake was to record a "select little party" at her house, at which "Mr. James Hope, Hallam, Monckton-Milnes, John Murray, Lady Fredk. Bentinck" were all present. "Mr. Milnes was excessively amusing, and the rest were better pleased to listen to him and Mr. Hallam than to talk themselves. In the evening came various people, among them Thackeray and 'Eothen'."<sup>4</sup> Such was the circle into which Ruskin was now eagerly received. It seems, indeed, that there was a particular magnet which drew him there, in the form of the "charming, high-foreheaded Charlotte Lockhart"<sup>5</sup> whom he had known when she was a girl, and who had now become magically transformed into a "Scottish fairy, White Lady, and witch of the fatallest sort, looking as if she had just risen out of the stream in Rhymers's Glen, and could only be seen by favouring glance of moonlight over the Eildons".<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it was her elusive Celtic charm: perhaps there was some unrealised glamour in the fact that she was the grand-daughter of his beloved Scott: anyhow, she seems soon to have captivated his imagination so completely that his parents began to consider her as a potential daughter-in-law. For himself, he was still so unskilled in such matters that when the "good-natured

<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange, *Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, vol. 2, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, second series, Ed. F. Chorley, vol. 1, p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. 422.

<sup>4</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. 422.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, *loc.*

Lady Davy contrived that he should take her down to dinner, instead of engaging her in conversation he argued across her for several courses with Gladstone who was on her other side.

His hopes were raised, however, when shortly afterwards Lockhart invited him to do a long review of Lord Lindsay's *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*; and though diffident of his capacity to do so with authority, he seems to have undertaken the task much in the same spirit that formerly he embarked upon blank verse tragedy for Adèle, in the fond illusion that this must be the surest way of awakening her interest in him, and winning her father's approval of his suit. But though Ruskin set off with "George" to Ambleside early in March to compose the elaborate essay that was to appear in the Quarterly the following June, the results of his labours were to prove singularly disappointing. For Lockhart severely edited his article, deleting, amongst other things, some unflattering remarks about Gally Knight because he happened to be a protégé of Murray's; and Charlotte made no sign that she had even seen it. And though it is said that the fond John James, upon these slender grounds, had even gone to the length of looking for a house for his intended daughter-in-law, her affections were probably already engaged elsewhere, as she married T. R. Hope-Scott the following autumn.

But there were other distractions of a significant nature in the spring of 1847. Euphemia Gray, the little girl for whom, six years before, he had written *The King of the Golden River*, was also in London; and undoubtedly Ruskin not only saw much of her, but took great pleasure in her society. By now she had grown into a singularly beautiful girl, elegant, agreeable, apparently intelligent, and apparently greatly interested in the art exhibitions and museums he took her so diligently to visit. It was always, for Ruskin, one of the greatest of pleasures to have some companion to whom he could impart his enthusiasms, and whose taste he hoped to form: and the more it appeared that she responded to his interests, the more fascinating to him she became. In May, he even wrote her some verses for her birthday, avowing lyrically:

"Thou thyself art fairer, sister,  
Than all the flowers of May;  
Had I brought thee birds and blossoms,  
Shamed were I and they!"<sup>1</sup>

Not a love poem, evidently, but a charming enough tribute from an admiring elder-brotherly friend.

Nevertheless, to all about him Ruskin seemed gloomy and depressed, so that later in the summer his parents, remembering the disastrous consequences which had followed his disappointment with Adèle, even feared that his health might be once more endangered.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 243.



The cause of Ruskin's deep melancholy, which had steadily been gaining upon him throughout the winter and had now reached a crisis, was doubtless a complicated combination of physical, psychological and emotional factors. For one thing, delicate in constitution as he was, and able to maintain good health only by deliberately avoiding all unnecessary drainages upon his energy, his sudden incursion into social life had probably exhausted him to the point of some slight renewed tubercular activity. For he was to write shortly to Miss Mitford: "I have most foolishly accepted evening invitations, and made morning calls, these last four months, until I am fevered by the friction. I have done no good, incurred many obligations, and suffered an incalculable harm."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin was never to derive any benefit from the artificialities of conventional social life. Wholly lacking in the passionate social curiosity of the young Proust, and the naive social ambitions of the young Tolstoy, he lacked also the essential tolerance and geniality, in addition to the prolonged social experience, that alone could have made his participation in the narrow and artificial atmosphere of the contemporary social scene anything but distasteful. Fitted by his intellectual capacities to mix freely with the greatest figures of his age, as he was to do intimately for the greater part of his remaining days, he was too vigorous in opinion and too candid in expression to exert the tact which alone makes social intercourse pleasant amongst the mediocre, or to practise the necessary hypocrisies required by good breeding to extract from his natural vehemence the occasional sting which gave rise to the charge of being disagreeable.

Lack of any important creative work was doubtless another factor in this mood of gloom; for although he had spent much time arranging and collating notes that were to be productive in his future books, the full concentration of energy that had gone to the writing of *Modern Painters* for the last four years was now dissipated, and his most vital energies of mind and emotion uncontrolled. He had spent the whole force of his intense and ardent spirit in the exposition and the praise of Turner, just when Turner's magnificent powers were beginning to wane; and for the moment it seemed as though the double source of his inspiration had failed him. But what most oppressed him was the profound sense and realisation of the slow withdrawal of spontaneous communion between his essential spirit and the natural world. He too had, like Wordsworth, walked with nature, and seen the world apparelled in celestial light; but now the ecstasy and the wonder had departed, and he was alone and friendless in the common day. Although naturally affectionate, and, in the course of his life, loved by many men and women of all ages and conditions, for Ruskin friendship was never to be more than an agreeable relaxation. The essential experience and consummation of life

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 19.6.1847: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 72.

lay in a right relationship between himself and the external world; and not only social intercourse, but friendship, were merely a bar to this high communion. A poet who could write only second-rate poetry, an artist who knew too well his own limitations, Ruskin's genius and power resided in his insight and appreciation of the most fundamental experience of life—the experience of consciousness—and, genius that he was, this he expressed in an idiosyncratic manner which absorbed his whole energies in a creative medium which was, in itself, a form of art.

As he sat at his window writing letters while, as he told Miss Mitford, "pleasant and odoriferous invitations" reached him through the open windows, and he watched them haymaking outside, "all the servants of the house—the maids in all manner of shaped bonnets, and the men in marvellously decorated hats, with ribands of inconceivable colours, . . . raking and shaking in goodly procession after a staggering cart",<sup>1</sup> his spirit was oppressed with a weight that he could not shake off.

The tranquil and well ordered life of Denmark Hill, and the continual over-solicitousness of his parents did little to soothe his restless depression and his distempered spirits, and after a few months he left home again, on the invitation of an Oxford friend, to join the Committee in support of Gladstone, who was standing as Member of Parliament for the University for the first time. But although the Chairman was sure that "Mr. Gladstone would appreciate at its full value the support of such high personal merit and extraordinary natural genius",<sup>2</sup> the excitement of the election and the activity of colleagues and old friends only added to his inner state of gloom. He was burdened with an oppressive sense of his own inadequacy; tortured by the memory of frustrated ambitions, wasted days, and profitless toil. He was troubled with his eyesight, and, evidently liverish, saw the evening sky covered with swimming strings and eels. At this, alarmed lest his son might be seriously ill, John James insisted upon another visit to Dr. Jephson. So Ruskin, ever obedient, meekly packed his traps and went. Dr. Jephson, examining him with an experienced eye, assured him that although there was as yet nothing the matter with him that could not soon be cured by quiet, exercise, regular hours, and his famous diet, there was nothing which might not very soon be the matter if he continued to go much into society or kept late hours. So Ruskin drank the waters and walked the promenades; and found some measure of consolation in the society of William MacDonald, a fellow patient of Jephson's, who happened also to be the son of an old friend of his father, who had brought him one or twice to Denmark Hill. A slender, dark-haired Highlander of twenty-three, whose naturally melancholy features were often lit by a

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vol. i, p. 329.

particularly charming smile, MacDonald was a fervent Scottish Evangelical, who had recently inherited a considerable fortune and a large estate in the Highlands; and, finding that he had much, besides old acquaintance, in common with Ruskin, invited him to visit him at his hunting lodge in Perthshire for the shooting.

Stopping en route at Dunbar, where he watched the fishermen lying staring at their nets hung out on the cliffs all day to dry, before they went to sea, and toiling all night to bring in a few casks of herrings about twice a week; and observed their "wives and children abused and dirty—scolding, fighting and roaring through their unvarying lives", Ruskin was deeply struck for the first time by the apparent futility of all human existence. "I cannot understand how you merry people can smile through the world as you go," he wrote to W. H. Harrison. "It seems to me a sad one, more suffering than pleasure in it, and less of *hope* than of either, at least if the interpretations set by the most pious people on the Bible be true, and if not, then worse still. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And as he pursued his way, by Loch Leven and Glen Farg, by the Inch of Perth, Dunkeld and Killiecrankie, charmed in spite of himself by the magic of early memories and old associations, he could not restrain himself from airing some of his grievances in his letters home to his anxious father.

John James, who not only acted still as his son's literary agent, but subsidised his work financially, had on several occasions admonished his gifted son in somewhat procrustean manner. But now, unceremoniously reproached, he apologised handsomely for his deficiencies. "Whilst reading now this unlucky first volume for press," he replied, "I had by me some loose proof sheets for second, and I have been so struck with superiority of (the) second volume, and so positively surprised at the work, that I became angry with myself for having by my impatience and obstinacy about the one thing in any way checked the flight or embarrassed the course of thoughts like these, and arrested such a mind in its progress in the track and through the means which to itself seemed best for aiming at its ends. . . . I take blame to myself for not sending you to the Highlands in 1838 and not buying you a few more Turners; but the first I was not at all aware of, and the second I freely confess I have been restrained in from my very constitutional prudence. . . . I have, you know, my dearest John, two things to do, to indulge you and to leave you and Mama comfortably provided for. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, reasonable and affectionate as was this reply, it did not materially alter for the future a certain latent antagonism in what was otherwise an unusually complete father-son relationship. For as the years advanced, the more Ruskin required, for his right development, complete independence of thought and action; while the older John James grew, the more

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.8.1847: *Works*, vol. 8, p. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 4.10.1847: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. xviii-xix.

he became crystallised in former attitudes and the less he could adapt himself to the flow of his son's original and progressive thought.

Towards the end of September Ruskin arrived at Crossmount Lodge near Loch Tummel, a "small whitewashed house with a little projecting square tower covered with ivy above the door, dining-room and drawing-room and little library on the ground floor", some six or seven small bedrooms above, and "a neat grass plot before".<sup>1</sup>

But after once accompanying MacDonald up Schiehallion with his keepers, the "mewing and shrieking of some seventy or eighty grey hares"<sup>2</sup> was too much for him and, in future, whenever his friend went shooting, Ruskin gave himself up to more congenial activities. Lying in the dry grass, he would draw grass blades, hawkweed and buttercup, "until every square foot of meadow, or mossy bank, became an infinite picture and possession to him, and the grace and adjustment to each other of growing leaves, a subject of more curious interest to him than the composition of any painter's masterpiece".<sup>3</sup> Or, pausing in his work, he would examine with minute attention the structure of some small wild flowers, aesthetic appreciation merged in the detached wonder of the scientist. When he felt more energetic, there was a fine crop of unwanted thistles to extirpate nearby, and on many a sunny afternoon, with aching back and forehead bathed in sweat, he would give himself up to simple physical labour, which left his mind free to meditate as he pleased. From a child upwards he had enjoyed amusing himself with spade or broom, and once, when abroad, to please his mother, he had carefully cleaned down the soiled steps of some rustic inn. But now, for the first time, he became deliberately aware of a certain satisfying quality in simple manual work that was later to become an important feature in his whole attitude to life.

Yet even the simple life failed to recreate in him the untroubled ecstasy that communion with nature had formerly afforded him: for from Pitlochry he wrote to his old tutor, Walter Brown: ". . . there was a time when the sight of a steep hill covered with pines cutting against blue sky, would have touched me with an emotion inexpressible, which, in the endeavour to communicate in its truth and intensity, I must have sought for all kinds of far off, wild, and dreamy images. Now I can look at such a slope with coolness, and observation of *fact*. I see that it slopes at twenty or twenty-five degrees; I know the pines are spruce fir—'Pinus nigra'—of such and such an age; and the rocks are slate of such and such a formation; the soil, thus, and thus; the day fine and the sky blue. All this I can at once communicate in so many words, and this is all which is necessarily seen. But it is not all the truth: there is something else to be seen there, which I cannot see but in a certain condition of mind, nor can I make anyone else see

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.9.1847: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Præterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 425.

<sup>3</sup> *Præterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 429.

it, but by putting him into that condition, and my endeavour in description would be, not to detail the facts of the scene, but by any means whatsoever to put my hearer's mind into the same ferment as my mind. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Two months later, similar feelings of this loss of reality and his consequent doubts as to the ultimate usefulness of his work are apparent in another letter written from Folkestone to the same friend. ". . . You say, in losing the delight I once had in nature I am coming down more to fellowship with others. Yes, but I feel it a fellowship of blindness. I may be able to get hold of people's hands better in the dark, but of what use is that, when I have no where to lead them but into the ditch? Surely, devoid of these imaginations and impressions, the world becomes a mere board-and-lodging house. The sea by whose side I am writing was once to me a friend, companion, master, teacher; now it is *salt water*, and salt water only. Is this an increase or a withdrawal of *truth*? I did not before lose hold or sight of the fact of its being salt water; I could consider it so, if I chose; my perceiving and feeling it to be more than this was a possession of higher *truth*, which did not interfere with my hold of the physical one."<sup>2</sup>

It was this lost hold upon the essential experience which he understood to be the basis of art, and the inevitable loss of self-confidence that it occasioned, which, coupled with Turner's failing health, doubtless caused Ruskin to lay aside his work upon *Modern Painters*.

## 2

Meanwhile, from Pitlochry there had been expeditions to Perth, where Ruskin called upon his old friends the George Grays, and saw Euphemia again, and was persuaded to stay with them for nearly three weeks.

In the setting of her home, it seems that Ruskin found her even more attractive than he had in London. Much courted in local society, she exhibited all the desirable accomplishments in those days required of marriageable girls. She sketched, she played elaborate pieces upon the piano, she did fine needlework: and Ruskin was far from being the only young man to admire her appealing grey eyes and her striking auburn hair.

It could not have been long before Ruskin was considering her as a potential wife, for on 5 October he confided his thoughts and feelings upon the subject in a long letter written from the Grays' house at Bowerswell to William MacDonald. "I love Miss Gray very much, and therefore cannot tell what to think of her, only this I know, that in many respects she is unfit to be my wife unless she loved me

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 28.9.1847: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 27.11.1847: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 83.

exceedingly. She is surrounded by people who pay her attentions, and though I believe most of them inferior in some points to myself, far more calculated to catch a girl's fancy. Still Miss Gray and I are old friends. I have every reason to think that if I were to try I could soon make her more than a friend, and if, after I leave this time, she holds out for six months more, I believe I shall ask her to come to Switzerland with me next year, and if she will not, or if she takes anyone else in the meantime, I am sadly afraid I shall enjoy my tour much less than usual, though no disappointment of this kind would affect me as the first did."<sup>1</sup> It would appear from this letter, not only that Effie had already rejected him once; but that in his heart he was perfectly well aware of the innate incompatibility of their temperaments.

It is difficult, on account of these reasons alone, to understand how the Ruskin marriage ever took place: the more so as the only people who should know anything of the subject, are diametrically opposed in their opinions. On the one hand, Holman Hunt, followed by E. T. Cook, adopts the view that the marriage was arranged by Mrs. Ruskin, and that Ruskin only allowed himself to be persuaded into it by his high sense of filial duty. Their story is that, seeing how much pleasure Ruskin appeared to derive from the companionship of the elegant and lively girl: how eloquently he explained to her the constitutions of Venice and Geneva: how ardently he undertook the task of forming her mind and taste, Margaret Ruskin, who, like all mothers, lived in a state of dread lest her son should fall in love with someone undesirable, one day announced to him, to his complete astonishment, that should he wish to make a proposal, his father would have no objection. To which Ruskin replied that although he liked Effie very much, he had no idea in his mind of marriage. At this, concealing beneath a guise of acquiescence an implacable determination, Mrs. Ruskin expressed regret that she had been mistaken, and begged him on no account to show any alteration in his manner towards Effie. Thus, while Ruskin continued to enjoy the society of the beautiful Miss Gray, Mrs. Ruskin devoted herself, at first tacitly, and later quite openly, to trying to convince him that he was himself unaware of the true state of her feelings—in which efforts she was finally successful.

Another story, on the other hand, believed by Effie's descendants, is that old Mrs. Ruskin at first bitterly opposed the marriage, principally on account of her own painful associations with Bowerswell—she had never forgotten that terrible morning when, on going into the garden, she had found her uncle with his throat cut—and that it was only with difficulty that Ruskin obtained her consent. Actually, these two stories are not entirely irreconcilable, and it is possible that although Mrs. Ruskin at first made objections, once she had become reconciled to the match, she grew impatient with Ruskin's doubts and

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 5.10.1847: R. H. Wilenski, *John Ruskin* (1933), p. 53.

vacillations, and did her utmost to persuade him of the rightness of his choice.

That Ruskin continued to have doubts long after his return from Perth is clear enough. For although he neglected his diary to write long letters to Effie, and could settle down to no work save a review of Eastlake's *History of Oil Painting* for the *Quarterly*, he wrote a long letter to William MacDonald on 20 February, in which he mentioned: "An old lady was telling me, but the day before yesterday, that if I was too particular about my wife I should assuredly get a bad one."<sup>1</sup> That old lady, presumably his own mother, evidently soon cozened him into agreement with her.

From the point of view not only of Ruskin's parents, but of Effie's, the match was very suitable. Ruskin was already a distinguished man, and the only son of a very rich one; and it is not unlikely that she too was considerably influenced by the attitude of her parents. Anyhow, before long Ruskin had overcome his own misgivings, and obtained Effie's consent: for on 13 March, 1854, he was writing eagerly, in a mood of mixed diffidence and ardour, to Lady Davy: "I am seeking your hills again to bring back from them a bride. I almost fear I am wrong in expressing my earnest desire to be permitted to introduce her to one from whom I have already received so much more consideration than I merit—but this hope is too strong to be repressed. I cannot tell you much of her—she is a sweet and modest girl—open hearted—and gentle in temper and manner. I think I may without even a lover's privilege—speak of her as beautiful. She is the daughter of a lawyer in Perth, and I think your friend Lady Ruthven will probably be able to tell you more of Miss Gray than I can or ought. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Shortly afterwards, he left Denmark Hill on his fatal journey to Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.2.1848: Wilenski, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 13.3.1848: quoted in Catalogue issued by Maggs Bros. Ltd. (1923), believed to be in the possession of Mr. Mikimoto, late of the Japanese Embassy, London.

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## Chapter II

1. *Disorder in Europe: the Chartists.* 2. *A strange honeymoon: Salisbury: illnesses: Abbeville: misgivings over Effie: early incompatibilities.* 3. *Religious doubts: the state of France.* 4. *Denmark Hill: friction between Effie and old Mrs. Ruskin: social triumphs.* 5. *Publication of "The Seven Lamps of Architecture": Ruskin's architectural views: the nature of architecture: fitness for purpose: the inspiration of architecture: the two lives: the effect of time: lack of a style: the cause of social unrest.* 6. *Reception of "The Seven Lamps": Dr. Furnivall's sketch of the author.*

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I

THE spring of 1848 was a period of general European disorder. Revolution swept the Continent like a plague, and soon threatened to spread to England. On 28 February, Charles Greville noted the disquieting speed with which the revolution in France had been accomplished: "On Monday, 22 February, a powerful, peaceful and apparently impregnable monarchy. On Wednesday, 24th of the same month, the whole of her Royalty scattered over the face of the earth, and France become a republic."<sup>1</sup> A week later he was recording the serious disorders elsewhere. "Within these last four or five days there has been a desperate battle in the streets of Berlin between the soldiers and the mob; the flight of the Prince of Prussia, the King's convocation of his States; concessions to, and reconciliations with his people; and his call to all Germany to form a Federal State; and his notification of what is tantamount to removing the Imperial Crown from the head of the wretched crétin at Vienna, and placing it on his own.

"Next, a revolution in Austria; an *émeute* at Vienna; downfall and flight of Metternich, and announcement of a constitutional régime; *émeutes* at Milan; expulsion of Austrians, and Milanese independence. Hungary up and doing, and the whole Empire in a state of dissolution. Throughout Germany all the people stirring; all the sovereigns yielding up to popular demands, the King of Hanover submitting to the terms demanded of him, the King of Bavaria abdicating. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Small wonder that the agitation of the Chartists in England filled many with the gravest apprehensions. "People here keep up their old foolish levity in speaking of these things," Carlyle noted in his journal on 27 March; "but considerate persons find them to be very grave, and indeed all, even the laughers, are in considerable secret

<sup>1</sup> *Greville Memoirs*, ed. Reeve, vol. 2, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 285.



alarm."<sup>1</sup> Greville, too, noted the seriousness of the situation. "The speeches which are made at different meetings are remarkable for the coarse language and savage spirit they display. It is quite new to hear any Englishmen coolly recommend assassination; and the other day a police superintendent was wounded in the leg by some sharp instrument. These are new and very bad symptoms, and it is impossible not to feel alarm when we consider the vast amount of the population as compared with any repressive power we possess. The extent and reality of the distress they suffer, the impossibility of expecting such masses of people to be eternally patient and forbearing, to restrain all their natural impulses, and endure tamely severe privations, when they are encouraged to do otherwise . . . all these considerations may well beget a presentiment of serious danger."<sup>2</sup>

By the time the day arrived for the much vaunted Chartist demonstration, all London was making preparations to defend itself. Clerks in the government offices, and gentlemen in the city, were sworn in as special constables; and the military police were on duty in great forces. Government offices were fortified, and guns procured to be used if necessary in their defence. On the same day that Ruskin was being married, Carlyle was writing of the "Revolution" to his wife. "Piccadilly itself, however, told us how frightened the people were. Directly at Hyde Park Corner one could see that there was something in the wind. Wellington had his iron blinds all accurately down; the Green Park was altogether shut, even the footpaths of it, the big gates of Constitution Hill; and in the inside there stood a score of mounted Guardsmen privately drawn up under the arch—dreadfully cold, I dare say. For the rest, not a single fashionable carriage was on the street . . . omnibuses running, a few cabs, and even a mud cart or two; nothing else; the flag pavements also nearly vacant, not a fifth of their usual population there, and those also of the strictly business kind; not a gentleman to be seen, hardly one or two of the sort called *gents*."<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, a formidable crowd, amongst whom were two young Academy students named Millais and Holman Hunt, marched to Kennington Common, with a petition which demanded universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, no property qualification, annual parliaments, and payment of members. But on being met by the police, all its leaders' militance suddenly vanished, and it dispersed, quite innocuously, in pouring rain.

Carlyle, gloomy as usual, wrote to his brother in June: "I suppose you hear enough about our Chartists; and how the French, and indeed all Nations, are puddling deep in the quagmire of Revolution and social distress: the Chartists do us next to no mischief here as yet (to

<sup>1</sup> Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. 1, p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> *Greville Memoirs*, ed. Reeve, vol. 2, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Froude, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 468.

us here at Chelsea, none at all); but the look of that concern is very ominous too, and I believe there are great miseries and confusions at no great distance for Britain generally, and bad days are coming, and must come before many years go. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the year the *Annual Register* was sonorously portentous. "The fountains of the great deep of the political society have been suddenly and violently broken up . . . the ultimate results of it it is impossible to predict or foresee. The year 1848 will be hereafter known as that of the great general revolt of nations against their rulers. Within the short space of twelve months centuries seem to have rolled away."

## 2

To a sensibility as fine as Ruskin's, all this had great influence upon his attitude to life; and he found it as painfully obligatory to re-adapt many of his ideas, as he found it difficult to adjust himself to life with a new companion. Used as he was to hours of solitude, he found strange the continual presence of a high-spirited young girl who had habitually courted strangers as fervently as he was accustomed to avoid them; and he noted the propensity with a benevolent detachment. "Effie talks to everybody she can make stand still, everywhere and anywhere," he wrote to his father from Tarbert on 13 April. "I did not leave her to herself for ten minutes at Kenmore, and when I came back, I found her inside the Turnpike engaged in confidential conversation with the Turnpike woman—and a gentleman smoking. Then at Killin, she got over an old man who showed us Finlanrig until she got into his cottage—and before I knew what she was about—she was sitting at the fire drinking the old gentleman's health in whisky—and paying him compliments on his clean butter tubs. We met some people on the road to-day, as we were walking—whom she addressed as if she had known them thirty years—and if I hadn't remonstrated, a little farther on, she would have been quite thick with a party of Tinkers: not to speak of various terriers and shepherds' dogs, and a lamb to-day—which she must needs have on her lap in the carriage. She does capitally well without any maid or help whatever—and is always ready in good time. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

For a week or so, as they travelled slowly down into Cumberland, he seems to have been in a bewildered dream: and the letter he wrote to Miss Mitford on 21 April has, at the beginning, a curiously artificial ring. "But you are better and the spring is come, and I hope, for I am sure you will allow me, to bring my young wife to be rejoiced (under the shadow of her new and grievous lot) by your kind comforting. But pray keep her out of your garden, or she will certainly lose her wits with pure delight, or perhaps insist on staying with you and

<sup>1</sup> *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. A. Carlyle (1904), vol. 2, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter from Tarbert (13.4.1848): original in Yale University Library.

letting me find my way through the world by myself, a task which I should not *now* like to undertake. . . ." Only when he turned to other matters did his tone resume something of its old spontaneous eloquence. "I begin to feel that all the work I have been doing, and all the loves I have been cherishing, are ineffective and frivolous—that these are not times for watching clouds or dreaming over quiet waters, that more serious work is to be done, and that the time for endurance has come rather than for meditation; and for hope rather than for happiness. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the month, the young couple had arrived at Denmark Hill, and Ruskin was writing letters to his friends apologising for "causing his wife to commit all kinds of breaches of etiquette". To George Richmond he confided that he felt doubtful whether he was not wasting his life, and very sad about it all. "Alas poor Milan, and my beloved spire, and now Verona in the thick of it,"<sup>2</sup> was his bitter lament; and, feeling even more strongly than ever that each architectural beauty that he most valued in Europe was now threatened, he determined to dedicate himself to the making of records that should preserve their memory for future generations.

Ruskin wished, as usual, to go abroad; but his parents were too apprehensive at all the political unrest to give their consent. So once his proofs were dispatched to the printers, he decided to make a tour of the English cathedrals instead. He first took his wife to Commemoration at Oxford, and then met his mother and father, who had no intention of depriving themselves of their beloved son's company simply because he happened to be married, at Salisbury. Mrs. Ruskin, indeed, seems, from the first, to have been quite determined that Effie should in no way interfere with her own relations with her son: and when, after a few weeks, Ruskin was driven into an over-intense activity by the pressure of his own personal problems, and worked himself into a state of fever by making detailed drawings and taking measurements—much to John James' boredom and disgust—with her usual despotic devotion she insisted upon them all returning at once to Denmark Hill, where, despite anything that Effie might have thought or wished, she herself put him to bed and presided over the sick room until he had recovered.

By this time the tension on the Continent seemed to have subsided; and, upon the advice of Miss Mitford, on 7 August he set out with Effie to pursue his architectural studies in Normandy.

"I seem born to conceive what I cannot execute, recommend what I cannot obtain, and mourn over what I cannot save."<sup>3</sup> Such was Ruskin's bitter lament to his father, after a few hours of sightseeing, in a long letter written home from Abbeville the following day.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 21.4.1848: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 86-7.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 1.5.1848: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 9.8.1848: *Works*, vol. 8, p. xxix.

However, he had not coughed once; the food at the Hotel de l'Europe was excellent, and Effie was delighted with the room and the place and the cooking and the waiter.

Two days later, Ruskin was obsessed with the desire to complete his notes and records while there was still time. Wherever he looked, he saw all that he most loved and valued sinking into ruin and disrepair, and it seemed that in twenty years not a vestige of the old part of the town—or of any other—would be left. Up regularly at six, as in the glorious days at Lucca, all morning he drew, measured, and made notes, while George was told off to trace bas-reliefs, and Effie sat at home writing up his notes. "We dine at half past one," he told his father, "then I am at Effie's service till four, then I draw again till six and come in again to a cutlet and a sip of tea—to bed at nine and up at six so as to get in a little reading before breakfast."<sup>1</sup>

As there was no Protestant church in the town, he took Effie to Mass instead. But despite a good and clearly spoken sermon, which reconciled her a little, she was quite frightened by the procedure, it seemed so shocking. To Ruskin himself, who had by now outgrown something of his vehement sectarianism of earlier days, the procedure seemed now to have a moving and seemly beauty that he had never before admitted.

Presently they made journeys to all the neighbouring places of interest, and spent long days wandering through the old streets of Lisieux, Falaise, Coutances, Avranches, Caudebec, St. Lo, Bayeux, Caen, Honfleur and Rouen, where Ruskin was continually struck with depression at the irremediable ravages of time. Carefully he noticed the effect of everything upon Effie, and reported her reactions in his letters home. When the diligences started at an inconvenient hour, he ordered a carriage lest so much travelling should try her. At first Effie seems to have been charmed by everything. "Effie says France agrees with her perfectly," he told his father on 15 August, "and she certainly seems to enjoy the clear air as much as you or I. She chats away with the people and is getting on fast with her French. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

It was some weeks before Ruskin realised that the studies which gave him such persistent satisfaction, to Effie must seem merely dull. For him, the porch at Abbeville was "so full, so fantastic,—so exquisitely picturesque"<sup>3</sup> that he seemed never to have seen it before; and even then it was probably a long time before he realised when his wife's professed enthusiasm became perfunctory, and finally died away.

It was a difficult situation from the first, and evidently it caused him much disquiet. "Poor Effie would be far better off with Papà and you than with me," he confided to his mother on 20 August, from Rouen, barely two weeks after their arrival in France, "for I go out on my own

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter from Abbeville (10.8.1848): original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, from Abbeville, (15.8.1848), original in Yale University Library.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 9.8.1848: *Works*, vol. 8, p. xxix.

account and when I come in, am often too tired or too late to take her out—so that unless she likes to come with me, always to the same place, she sometimes does not go out all day—and I sometimes cannot—for fear of cold, and sometimes will not—for fear of losing time, stop with her to look at the shops, the flowers or the people. But she is very good and enjoys herself when she is out and is content to stop at home. Only you have certainly spoiled me, my dear mother, as far as expectations of walks are concerned—by your excellent walking. I had no idea of the effect of fatigue on women. Effie—if I take her, after she is once tired—half a mile round—is reduced nearly to fainting and comes in with her eyes full of tears. If however I can once get her to any place where she will rest—she will wait for me three hours together (and I certainly could not always say as much for you). So I carry my camp seat in my pocket—and when I want to make a note of anything Effie sits down; n'importe où—on not the cleanest place always—and is as quiet as a mouse. She is also a capital investigator, and I owe it to her determined perseverance and fearlessness of dark passages or dirt in the cause of philosophy—or curiosity—that I saw the other (day) the interior of the Abbaye St. Amand. Her fatigue too depends more on the heat than the distance—and she has been up the St. Catherine with me this evening with great enjoyment—much increased by finding heather and bluebells in quantities on the top. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Despite his keen awareness of the incompatibility of their tastes, and the difficulty of effecting any adjustment agreeable to them both, Ruskin was at this time perfectly able to see his wife's difficulties, and also to sympathise with them. “Effie might with reason feel a little dull here,” he wrote to John James on 10 September from St. Lo, “for she is left alone more than half the day, but she says she likes it very much—and we enjoy our afternoon walk the more.”

## 3

While Effie was enjoying herself looking with innocent and amiable eye upon the flowers, the people and the shops, Ruskin observed the daily life of Republican France with a detestation bordering upon the vitriolic, and wrote home bitterly that the mental and moral degradation were beyond all he had conceived—that it was the very reign of idiotism and of sin. “It has made me think something more seriously than usual,” he told his father on 24 August, “of all the old difficulties which so often have arisen in men's minds respecting God's government of this world, and many other difficulties which stand in the way of one's faith. I believe that you, as well as I, are in the same condition, are you not, father? Neither of us *can* believe, read what we may of reasoning or proof: and I tell you also frankly that the more

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter from Rouen (20.8.1848): original in Yale University Library.

I investigate and reason over the Bible as I should over any other history or statement, the more difficulties I find, and the less ground of belief; and this I say after six years of very patient work of this kind, at least in those hours set apart for such study. Now, this is very painful—especially so, it seems to me, in a time like the present, full of threatening, and in which wickedness is so often victorious and unpunished; nothing but sorrow can come from a doubtful state of mind even in this world.”<sup>1</sup>

Such was the bewilderment of mind, varying in intensity at different times, that Ruskin was henceforward to experience for very many years.

Similarly mournful was his vision of the political scene, for from Calais he wrote to W. L. Harrison two months later: “At Rouen, where we stayed about three weeks, the distress, though nearly as great, is not so ghastly, and seems to be confined in its severity to the class of workmen. There seems, however, everything to be dreaded both here and at Paris—and the only door of escape seems to be the darkest—that which grapeshot opens. I do not see how another struggle for pillage is avoidable—a simple fight of the poor against the rich—desperate certainly—and likely to be renewed again and again. . . . Vagabonds and ruffians—undisguised—fill the streets, only waiting—not for *an* opportunity, but for the *best* opportunity of attack. And yet even from the faces of these I have seen the malice and brutality vanish if a few words of ordinary humanity were spoken to them. And if there were enough merciful people in France to soothe without encouraging them, and to give them some—even the slightest sympathy and help in such honest efforts as they make—few though they be—without telling them of their Rights or their injuries—the country might still be saved. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, when he first seriously contemplated the Two Worlds, it was not in England, but in France. But how to reconcile them—how to inculcate the qualities of mutual duty, understanding, tolerance and good will—how to restore the workman from the degraded position to which he had been driven by the extensive use of the machine, and to wean the upper classes from the new religion that little else mattered but wealth, which was one of the direct results of the enormous increase in prosperity due to the rise of manufactures—this was the great problem that was to absorb his mind and energies with an ever-increasing power, to the end.

## 4

When the young couple returned home, they went to stay for a few weeks with the old people at Denmark Hill. And here, already,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 24.8.1848: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 24.10.1848: *Works*, vol. 8, p. xxxiii.

friction began to manifest itself between Effie and Margaret Ruskin. Effie had been one of a large family—affectionate and unceremonious, where, providing the habit was not indulged in to excess, it was not considered a crime to come home late from a party, or to be late for meals. Old Mrs. Ruskin, however, always humourless and intolerant, always rigid in her code of manners, had crystallised now into a martinet who could be amiable only so long as no one ever disturbed the perfect order which she established and maintained within her household. At Denmark Hill, everything moved by hidden machinery with the most perfect efficiency. Dairy produce from the little farm; choice fruit and flowers from the hothouse; simple, perfectly cooked meals; all these appeared regularly without the slightest interruption. While Mary Richardson had been of the household, her meek, unassertive and good-natured disposition had adapted itself to the family routine with a consistency that never failed. She was always at hand when wanted; she was never late. She appreciated everything, agreed to everything, and submitted to everything, with the willingness of a perfect paid companion.

With Effie, things were very different. She was young, full of vitality, used, as the eldest of the family, to having much of her own way, and accustomed to receiving great admiration. She sometimes came home late from parties, and she was often late for meals. Mrs. Ruskin showed her displeasure in characteristic manner. She insisted upon sitting up at night until Effie had returned. She refused to have meals served until Effie was seated at her accustomed seat at table. Thus the smooth machinery of the household was continually disorganised, and Effie frequently made to feel the enormity of each offence.

Ruskin himself tried to be strictly impartial in these matters. He sympathised with Effie's youth and beauty, and, because his health would not permit him to be out late at night, saw no reason why she should not do so if she wished. He realised that she often had to adapt herself patiently to his ways, and felt it only fair that she should indulge in such innocent frivolities as she wished in return. But he had also inherited very strongly his mother's fine sense of order; and when the household was put out by Effie's harmless, wayward ways, it is probable that his secret sympathies were with old Mrs. Ruskin. Above all, he disliked friction, and felt that it was ridiculous that Effie and his mother could not adapt themselves to each other's ways without continual fuss, even while his keen insight permitted him to understand fully why they could not do so.

There were occasions when the friction developed into a stubborn, silent form of warfare. That Christmas, for example, Effie was ill with influenza and wished to keep to her room. Mrs. Ruskin, who prided herself upon her knowledge of illness, and, as we have seen, trusted her own powers so completely that she dragged her son up Vesuvius when

he was ailing with active tuberculosis, insisted that she was well enough to come down to join the Christmas dinner. When she was intent upon getting her own way, she could be formidable and implacable enough; and she simply refused to believe that Effie was really ill.

Fortunately, their stay at Denmark Hill was not sufficiently long to provoke a crisis, and after a few weeks Ruskin and Effie were established in a handsomely furnished house in Park Street, where, generously subsidised by John James, who wished for nothing better than that they should go into society, the distinguished young writer of *Modern Painters* and his elegant and beautiful wife were frequently seen at fashionable dinners and evening parties; descriptions of which were always sent to the old couple at Denmark Hill, who vicariously enjoyed the social triumphs in which they did not share. On one occasion, Jenny Lind was present, and prevailed upon to sing. Ruskin reported that he found her "most sweet and ladylike",<sup>1</sup> and even hoped to have some conversation with her, so that he could gracefully invite her to see the Turners at Denmark Hill. But, to his disappointment, she left the room as soon as her song was over. Next morning, however, he realised that he had probably been spared some grave embarrassment, for when he told his mother about it, she was "horrified", and seemed to regard the Swedish Nightingale as little better than "an actress".

Nevertheless, for Ruskin, it was a winter of intensive industry; for besides the little essay published anonymously in the *Art Journal* upon Prout—Prout whose works, the author avowed, would one day "be cherished with a melancholy gratitude, when the Pillars of Venice shall lie mouldering in the salt shallows of the sea"<sup>2</sup>—between November 1848 and April 1849 he not only composed the whole of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, but drew and himself etched all the plates with which the book was to be illustrated. With characteristic zeal, he threw the whole of himself into his new task, and, as usual, it was only with the greatest difficulty that he was able to keep it within formal bounds, and to restrain his *Seven Lamps* from growing into "eight—or nine—or even quite a vulgar row of footlights".<sup>3</sup>

## 5

*The Seven Lamps of Architecture* was published on 10 May, 1849, at the price of one guinea, and in his preface Ruskin expressed his complete willingness to bear the charge of impertinence which he knew must be associated with a writer assuming a dogmatic tone in speaking of an art which he has never practised; although he considered that his fundamental understanding of architecture in relation

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 31.1.1849: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Painters: Works*, vol. 3, p. 662.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 8, p. 138 n.



to art, place, and history alone gave him ample authority so to speak.

Ruskin's main contention, with regard to the practice of architecture, is that to consider the architectural profession as an independent body is merely a modern fallacy. In all the greatest ages of art fine buildings have been erected only under the influence of some artist of genius: the Parthenon under Phidias, the Cathedral of Florence under Giotto, St. Peter's at Rome under Michael Angelo.

Architecture is that art which "so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power and pleasure".<sup>1</sup> The actual raising of the edifices is simply building. To become architecture, the building must be adorned, at the cost of sacrifice but never at the cost of truth, with the most beautiful and costly materials, the most beautiful and costly work, of which man is capable. All architecture which indulges in deceptions is corrupt architecture. The suggestion of false modes of structure: surfaces painted to represent some other material than that of which they actually consist, and the use of any cast or machine-made ornament—all these, instead of raising building to the level of architecture, merely debase it to a travesty of the term.

The axiom of "fitness for purpose", so beloved and belaboured by the twentieth-century revolutionary, Ruskin simply took as a matter of course. As he was to state later in his *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, "the essential thing in a building,—its *first* virtue,—is that it be strongly built, and fit for its uses. The noblest thing in a building, and its *highest* virtue, is that it be nobly sculptured or painted".<sup>2</sup> It was when it came to the nature of embellishment that Ruskin's arguments frequently left the realm of practical common sense for that of personal idiosyncrasy and arbitrary opinion: and, toying ingeniously with a new idea, pushed it with precarious result to a strange excess. Festoons and garlands, for example, are not, in Ruskin's view, true ornament at all. Ornament "must consist of such studious arrangements of form as are imitative or suggestive of those which are commonest among natural existences, that being of course the noblest ornament which represents the highest orders of existence. Imitated flowers are nobler than imitated stones; imitated animals than flowers; imitated human form, of all animal form the noblest".<sup>3</sup> But although no one would care to deny that the Parthenon Frieze and the Michael Angelo ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome are amongst the greatest decoration produced by man, it does not necessarily follow, as Ruskin would have us suppose, that the Greek key pattern, as an ornament, is wholly execrable. Here is where, as was to happen so often with Ruskin as an art critic, the ephemeral opinions of the personal man were to interfere with his extraordinary

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 8, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 12, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 8, p. 154.

and impersonal grasp of essential principles. And while the most advanced exponent of modern architecture would find it no less pleasurable than Ruskin to "have the power of going through the streets of London, pulling down brackets and friezes and large names, restoring to the tradesmen the capital they had spent on architecture, and putting them on honest and equal terms, each with his name in black letters over his door",<sup>1</sup> few would exert any vigorous discrimination between the formal and the natural in the enrichments they demolished.

When it comes to the most fundamental principle of life, of the consciousness and vitality that inform all living architecture, Ruskin's understanding, his clarity and beauty of formulation remain unsurpassed. For here, enshrined in a fleeting paragraph in which the most elevated and subtle truth is expressed with lucidity in the most appropriate and moving words, lies a whole philosophy: that very philosophy that over half a century later the young Proust was to take, at the precise period when he imagined himself to be fully emancipated from his Bergotte's influence, for the subtle, evasive but embracing structure of his great novel. "When we begin to be concerned with the energies of man, we find ourselves instantly dealing with a double creature. Most part of his being seems to have a fictitious counterpart, which it is at his peril if he do not cast off and deny. Thus he has a true and false (otherwise called a living and dead, or a feigned and unfeigned) faith. He has a true and a false hope, a true and a false charity, and, finally, a true and a false life. His true life is like that of lower organic beings, the independent force by which he moulds and governs external things; it is a force of assimilation which converts everything around him into food, or into instruments; and which, however humbly or obediently it may listen to or follow the guidance of superior intelligence, never forfeits its own authority as a judging principle, as a will capable either of obeying or rebelling. His false life is, indeed, but one of the conditions of death or stupor, but it acts, even when it cannot be said to animate, and is not always easily known from the true. It is that life of custom and accident in which many of us pass much of our time in the world; that life in which we do what we have not proposed, and speak what we do not mean, and assent to what we do not understand; that life which is overlaid by the weight of things external to it, and is moulded by them, instead of assimilating them; that which, instead of growing and blossoming under any wholesome dew, is crystallised over with it, as with hoar frost, and becomes to the true life what an arborescence is to a tree, a candied agglomeration of thoughts and habits foreign to it, brittle, obstinate, and icy, which can neither bend nor grow, but must be crushed and broken to bits, if it stand in our way. All men are liable to be in some degree frost-bitten in this sort; all are partly

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

encumbered and crusted over with idle matter; only, if they have real life in them, they are always breaking this bark away in noble rents, until it becomes, like the black stripe upon the beech tree, only a witness of their own inward strength. But, with all the efforts that the best men make, much of their time passes in a kind of dream, in which they indeed move, and play their parts sufficiently, to the eyes of their fellow dreamers, but have no clear consciousness of what is around them or within them; blind to the one, insensible to the other, *ωσθροι*.”<sup>1</sup>

This rare state of clear consciousness, or true life, is, for Ruskin, the only valid medium in which the theoretic faculty can work, or true art be inspired, whether in architecture or in painting; just as it is the circumambient and omnipresent influence of the dream state which debases every activity of mankind in the chaos of the actual world. Symbolic of these two states of consciousness—the waking state and the dream state—is ornament that is produced lovingly by hand, and ornament that is turned out perfunctorily by machine. To those who are vitally responsive to architecture, “the life and accent of the hand are everything. They had rather not have ornament at all, than see it ill cut—deadly cut, that is”.<sup>2</sup>

It is not blunt, nor coarse stone carving that is abhorrent; but carving that is lifeless and mechanical—“the smooth, diffused tranquillity of heartless pains—the regularity of a plough in a level field”.<sup>3</sup>

Such carving must always be bereft of true significance, if only because sculpture is not the cutting of the form of a thing in stone, but the cutting of the effect of it: for which every touch must be calculated, every faculty alert. The only right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is whether or not it was done with conscious enjoyment, with the happiness of the carver. “It may be the hardest work possible, and the harder because so much pleasure was taken in it; but it must have been happy too, or it will not be living. How much of the stone-mason’s toil this condition would exclude I hardly venture to consider, but the condition is absolute.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as the happy co-operation of the workman is a necessary condition in authentic architecture, so is the deliberate sense of obligation, the realisation that for us the earth is an entail and not a possession, that its heirs are the future generations of all time, and that without the idea of permanence, of memory, there can be no significant intergrowth and connection between the present and the past, or the present and the future. “When we build, let us think that we build for ever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 191-3.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, *l.c.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 218.

think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labour and wrought substance of them, 'See! this our fathers did for us'. For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

The mystery and the magic of centuries of associations, of brick and stone impressed with memory of those long dead, as gloriously defaced with moss and lichen, or the weathering of a thousand storms, was always to be, for Ruskin, a manifestation almost sacred in its inimitable majesty and beauty; a mystery that it was sacrilege to destroy, and even a greater sacrilege to seek to imitate. Hence his indignation at all so-called contemporary restoration; which to him meant "the most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered: a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed".<sup>2</sup> To him, it was as impossible to restore the great and the beautiful in architecture as to raise the dead. The animating spirit of the workmen who created it is gone forever, and for others to seek to imitate it is the grotesque impertinence and the most grievous folly. "Another spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building; but the spirit of the dead workmen cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct other hands, and other thoughts."<sup>3</sup>

True architecture, to be such, is always the manifestation of a living school, the work of men of genius expressing themselves with fullest power and individuality within the limits of a recognised and characteristic style. And it is obedience to the laws of the prevailing style that have made certain periods of architecture great. "Other necessities are matters of doubt: nations have been alike successful in their architecture in times of poverty and of wealth: in times of war and of peace: in times of barbarism and refinement: under governments the most liberal or the most arbitrary; but this one condition has been constant, this one requirement clear in all places and at all times, that the work shall be that of a *school*, that no individual caprice shall dispense with, or materially vary, accepted types and customary decorations; and that from the cottage to the palace, and from the chapel to the basilica, and from the garden fence to the fortress wall, every member and feature of the architecture of the nation shall be as commonly current, as frankly accepted, as its language or its coin."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, *l.c.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 252.

Here again, with his easy, intuitive grasp of fundamental principles, Ruskin makes clear the whole failure of European post-eighteenth-century architecture. "We have sciences, but no science," was Bazarov's lament in *Fathers and Sons*: and "We have styles, but no style" has been the lament of every sensitive modern architect since the days when the follies of Beckford and Walpole and the revivals of Pugin began to undermine the obedient originalities of the Brothers Adam: and no plea of new materials and new methods of construction is adequate explanation of the licence of a modern architecture which has turned every city into a manifestation of chaos and every suburb into an object of derision or disgust.

Thus, nearly one hundred years after they were penned, Ruskin's words have an even greater significance and an even more urgent message than they had in the incipient years of anarchy of the 1850's. "There are some things which we not only want, but cannot do without; and all the struggling and raving in the world, nay more, which all the real talent and resolution in England, will never enable us to do without: and these are Obedience, Unity, Fellowship, and Order. And all our schools of design, and committees of taste; all our academies and lectures, and journalisms and essays; all the sacrifices which we are beginning to make, all the truth which there is in our English nature, all the power of our English will, and the life of our English intellect, will be in this matter as useless as efforts and emotions in a dream, unless we are contented to submit architecture and all art, like other things, to English law."<sup>1</sup>

But if these words, until such time as the fulfilment of their plea renders them obsolete, have as significant a message for the chaotic world of to-day as they had a century ago; no less significant for our disrupted world is the powerful peroration occasioned by social upheavals which, in their day, seemed to observers no less volcanic than the vaster chaos of our own. "All the horror, distress, and tumult which oppress the foreign nations, are traceable . . . to the simple one of their not having enough to do. I am not blind to the distress among their operatives; nor do I deny the nearer and visibly active causes of the movement: the recklessness of villainy in the leaders of revolt, the absence of common moral principles in the upper classes, and of common courage and honesty in the heads of governments. But these causes themselves are ultimately traceable to a deeper and simpler one: the recklessness of the demagogue, the immorality of the middle class, and the effeminacy and treachery of the noble, are traceable in all these nations to the commonest and most fruitful cause of calamity in households—idleness. We think too much in our benevolent efforts, more multiplied and more vain day by day, of bettering men by giving them advice and instruction. There are few who will take either: the chief thing they need is occupation. I do

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 255.

not mean work in the sense of bread,—I mean work in the sense of mental interest; for those who either are placed above the necessity of labour for their bread, or who will not work although they should. There is a vast quantity of idle energy among European nations at this time, which ought to go into handicrafts; there are multitudes of idle semi-gentlemen who ought to be shoemakers and carpenters; but since they will not be these so long as they can help it, the business of the philanthropist is to find them some other employment than disturbing governments. . . . We have just spent . . . a hundred and fifty millions, with which we have paid men for digging ground from one place and depositing it in another. We have formed a large class of men, the railway navvies, especially reckless, unmanageable, and dangerous. We have maintained besides (let us state the benefits as fairly as possible) a number of ironfounders in an unhealthy and painful employment; we have developed (this at least is good) a very large amount of mechanical ingenuity; and we have, in fine, attained the power of going fast from one place to another. Meantime we have had no mental interest or concern ourselves in the operations we have set on foot, but have been left to the usual vanities and cares of our existence. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the first to realise the greatest cause of that social unrest which, already vociferous, was to increase until, despite one palliative after another, it was to convulse the world—that the processes of mechanised and mass production in their present manner of organisation inevitably deprived man of the essential satisfaction most necessary to his intellectual and moral well-being—Ruskin made the fundamental error which was followed by all the great reformers who came after him: the fallacy that the escape from the tragic dilemma imposed by the industrial age is to be achieved by a return to the methods and conditions of the past. It never once seemed to have occurred to him, clear as was his insight and detached his judgment, that only the intelligent application of modern methods of production can free man from slavery and afford him that nourishment of the higher faculties which alone makes possible the true life of the spirit.

## 6

Although the plates of the first edition were unsatisfactory, and were presently withdrawn, the reception given to *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* was fairly favourable. But it sowed the seeds of a lasting antagonism between Ruskin and the architectural profession, much as *Modern Painters* had already sown the seeds of hostility between himself and the Academy. The general tone of the book, too, was not only dogmatic but, as with his previous one, in places verged upon a

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 261-4.

sectarian intolerance which, in his later years, he was to censure and to regret.

Nevertheless, it was not only an important work, but one of particular significance in Ruskin's development. It was his first effort to synthesise into an organic unity his artistic and his social ideas, and to demonstrate that the theoretical abstraction of art from life can, in practice, lead only to social unrest and social disorder.

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## Chapter III

1. *Switzerland again: further studies for "Modern Painters"*. 2. *Venice: difficulties of research*. 3. *Social distractions: presentation at Court: dinners at Denmark Hill*. 4. *"Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds"*.

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1

NO SOONER were the corrected proof sheets of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* despatched to the publishers, than Ruskin, as usual, felt the need of a change of scene. Early in April, Effie, who had not yet fully recovered from the influenza which old Mrs. Ruskin persisted in believing to be largely imaginary, had gone home to Perth, partly in order to recuperate, and partly to console her mother for the loss of one of her young brothers—a little boy of eight. Evidently, though not on intimate, Ruskin and his wife were still on affectionate terms. "I have indeed been most happy as you suppose of me," he wrote on 15 April to Dr. Brown, in the same slightly artificial manner that he had previously written to Miss Mitford, "yet what has been on the one hand a source of joy, has on the other been attended with many of distress, my poor wife having had much to bear since she was mine, friend after friend, and at last her little brother, being taken away. It is as if many of the ties which bound her to her home had been dissolved that she might become more entirely mine, as I am therefore, if possible, more entirely hers. And yet I have to part with her just now for a long, long time, for her health has been injured by these repeated shocks, and I am afraid to take her with me where I am going—leaving town as I trust next Wednesday the 18th for Chamouni and Zermatt where living in chalets and walking in snow would be her only means of wifely companionship with me. I trust that she is now gaining strength, and that when she is restored to me, or as I feel almost inclined to say, when we are married next time, I hope to take better care of her."<sup>1</sup> John James and Margaret were, of course, only too pleased to seize this opportunity to accompany their cherished son, and the three of them set out together towards the end of April. Ruskin had already arranged to meet Richard Fall at Chambéry, and was not without hope that George Richmond might be able to join him at Geneva. Most of the time was spent at Vevey, Chamouni and Geneva, though, as usual, the party moved frequently from place to place.

"I am in Switzerland, I am in Switzerland, I am in Switzerland,"<sup>2</sup> he intoned to himself over and over again when they had crossed the

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.4.1849: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 5, p. xix.



border; and it seemed that all the anxiety and disappointments of recent years had dropped away from him; and his soul was calm and contented as a boy's. Nevertheless, there were times when he could not evade all memory of the bitter secret tragedy of his marriage: when, staring with deliberate intent at the solemn gold and crimson incandescence of the sunset, he would deliberately seek to cheat despair by reminding himself, and recording later, that in spite of everything he had much to thank God for, now and ever.

Accompanied by the amenable and the amiable George, who now proudly carried, amongst other impedimenta, the daguerreotype box with which Ruskin took the first image of the Matterhorn and of the aiguilles of Chamouni ever to be recorded by the sun; protected by the competent and philosophic Couttet, still commissioned to "look after" him, Ruskin was graciously permitted to pursue his studies of clouds and mountains for a month by himself at Chamouni, whilst his parents returned to the less exalted amenities of Geneva. But although a married man of thirty, when he wished to exceed the time agreed by even a few days, he was still obliged to write to his parents for permission to do so in the humbly solicitous manner of a schoolboy. It seems to have been as a schoolboy that his parents still considered him, for their letters were still full of parental exhortations, as were his of filial promises of obedience. "You need not be alarmed about riding," he assured his father on 24 August. "I never intend to mount a horse when I can help it—neither Effie nor anyone else shall ever make me. . . ."

A few days later Ruskin had dutifully returned to his parents; and a short time afterwards, having spent several days in Paris so that he could study in the Louvre, they were home.

## 2

Two weeks later, Ruskin set out with his wife and a friend of hers to act as her companion, to spend the winter at his beloved Venice, partly because she wished to see Venice, and partly in order that he could collect material for the new work which for some time had been crystallising in his mind. They made a leisurely trip: stopping at Chamouni on the way, and pausing often to admire the beauties of Northern Italy; so that it was not until November that they reached Venice, where they took apartments for the winter in the fashionable Hotel Danieli. Under the friendly tutelage of that famous Anglo-Italian, Rawdon Brown, he soon became acquainted with the libraries that housed the archives of the city.

"When I came home I found my wife much better and desirous of some change of scene," he told Walter Brown on 11 December. "She asked me to take her to Venice, and as I had need of some notes for the sketches of Venetian art, which you would perhaps see advert-

ised by Smith and Elder, I was glad to take her there. Once again in Italy with the winter before me, I have engaged in a more detailed survey of the Italian Gothic than I ever hoped to have obtained; finding, however, the subject so intricate that I have forgotten or laid aside everything for it. I have not written a single line to any of my friends, except two *necessary* letters, since I left home, and my wife has been four weeks in Venice without seeing, in my company, more than the guide books set down as the work of half a day.”<sup>1</sup> This sacrifice on Effie’s part was duly appreciated by John James; who wrote later that “your mama and I have with pleasure noted that when abroad with Effie you do far more work than with us. She has most unselfishly left you to your work.” Mr. Smith had recently brought the celebrated author of *Jane Eyre* to Denmark Hill, and the compliment had evidently pleased him.

About a fortnight later Ruskin was informing his father of his latest impressions of the city and his difficulties with his work. “The more I see of the town—and I have now explored almost every corner of it,—the more fixed my impression is of hopeless ruin; fully concealed by scrabbles of whitewash—or by bad new brickwork—but ruin alike of palace and cot.

“A week or two ago I commissioned my valet-de-place to obtain permission for me to draw the windows of the Palazzo Bernardo, and I had hope for once of being admitted into a palace by the permission of its rightful owner. I was so—and found myself in a well-furnished room, with, however, the unsuitable adjunct of some clothes drying outside, the window not being the one I wanted. I asked to go upstairs. Alas, the Count owned but a single flat in his family palace—and I have now to get permission from the lodger above. In my walk to-day I passed through some of the outskirts of the city towards the mainland. I had little conception of anything so grass-grown or melancholy—all ruined walls—neglected patches of garden surmounted by rotten stakes, or heaps of refuse and waste land—heaps and banks of kneaded mud or fallen walls—not even the picturesque nets of Italy to redeem it. . . . I see no hope for better things—the indolence of the people is unconquerable. Mr. Brown recommended me one man as the only one who knew *anything* of those connected with the library of the Ducal Palace. I asked him, among other matters, whether the windows, which have now no tracery in them, ever had any. Never, he said—there was not the slightest trace of it. These windows require ladders to get up to them and are difficult in the opening—so it struck me as quite possible that nobody might have taken the trouble to look. Yesterday I went for this special purpose—got the library steps and opened all the windows, one after another, round the palace. I found the bases of the shafts of the old tracery—the holes for the bolts which had fastened it—the marks of

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.12.1849: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 104.

the exact diameter on the wall—and finally, in a window at the back, of which I believe not one of the people who have written on the place know so much as the existence—one of its spiral shafts—capital and all.”<sup>1</sup>

When spring came, despite three months of hard work, he was still far from the end of his preliminary labours. But his parents were unwell, his mother “sickened and sorrowed to see his face again”; and soon the young couple made their way homeward by way of Genoa and the French Riviera.

## 3

On their return home, Ruskin and his wife paid their usual respects to the old couple at Denmark Hill, and then spent the season in the furnished house in Park Street. But although Ruskin soon began writing the first volume of *The Stones of Venice*, his work, until the autumn, was continually interrupted by the demands of social life. He was now considered one of the distinguished figures of the day, and his circle of literary and artistic acquaintances was continually increasing. He was a member of the Athenæum Club; he was introduced to Watts, whom he presently commissioned to paint a portrait of his wife: he met Carlyle, and joined the steadily growing band of devotees who went of an evening to drink tea with the prophet in Cheyne Row; and, through Emily Augusta, wife of the poet, and daughter of his old friend and tutor, Dr. Andrews, he became friendly with Coventry Patmore. He paid his respects to Rogers, and, accompanied by his wife, was to be seen once more adorning the breakfast gatherings where the wit and talent of the day still considered it an honour to assemble.

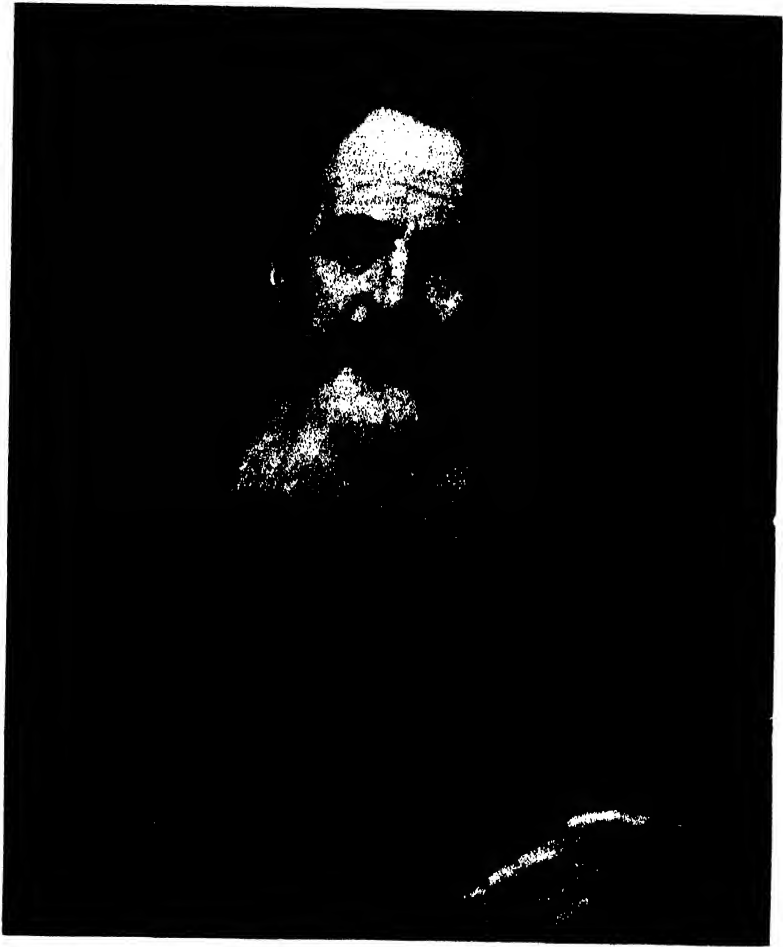
There were also distractions even more frivolous, and very trenchantly Ruskin described them in his daily dutiful letters to his parents. “Horrible party last night—stiff—large—dull, fidgety,—strange,—run-against-everybody—know-nobody sort of party. Naval people. Young lady claims acquaintance with me. I know as much of her as of Queen Pomare. Talk. Get away as soon as I can—ask who she is—Lady Charlotte Elliott—as wise as I was before. Introduced to a black man with chin in collar. Black man condescending. I abuse several things to black man, chiefly the House of Lords. Black man says he lives in it—asks where I live—I don’t want to tell him—obliged. Black man asks,—go away and ask who he is. Mr. Shaw Lefevre—as wise as I was before. Introduced to a young lady—young lady asks if I like drawing—go away and ask who she is—Lady Something Conyngham. Keep away with back to the wall and look at watch. Get away at last—very sulky this morning. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 23.12.1849: *Works*, vol. 9, pp. xxix–xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of April 1850: Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin* (1900), p. 122.

IX. SIR JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS, BT., P.R.A.

*By Charles Robert Leslie*



X. W. HOLMAN HUNT

*By Sir W. B. Richmond, R.A.*

Shortly afterwards, Ruskin and his wife attend a reception at Court, and once again the dutiful son sent John James a record of their social triumphs—one letter following speedily upon another. "I got through excellently well, and I believe I did what was right—and I *thought* that Prince Albert put something like markedness into his bow, but that may be his general manner. The Queen looked much younger and prettier than I expected—very like her pictures, even like those which are thought to flatter most—but I only saw the profile—I could not see the front face as I knelt to her, at least without an upturning of the eyes, which I thought would be unseemly—and there were but some two or three seconds allowed for the whole affair. After waiting an hour and three quarters I think they really might allow people a quarter of a minute each, and time them off. The Queen gave her hand very graciously, but looked bored: poor thing, well she might be, with about a quarter of a square mile of people to bow to. . . ." Then followed the triumphs of his beautiful wife . . . "at one place there was the most awkward crush I ever saw in my life—the pit at the Surrey, which I never saw, may, perhaps, show the like—nothing else. The floor was covered with the ruins of ladies' dresses, torn lace, and fallen flowers; but Effie was luckily out of it, and got through unscathed, and heard people saying, 'What a beautiful dress!' just as she got up to the Queen. It was fatiguing enough, but not so awkward as I expected. Effie had no difficulty, nor was in any embarrassment. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

There were frequent dinners at Denmark Hill, whither Ruskin's new artist friends, such as Watts, were invited for the gratification of John James, by now a liberal and well-known patron of the arts; and there were even more frequent luncheon and dinner parties at the houses of the fashionable hostesses of the day. Lady Eastlake, for example, met them at Mr. Ford's, where there was "a most agreeable party—Lady Davy, the Bunsens, Lord Lovelace, Dr. and Mrs. Ferguson, the Ruskins, Mr. Prescott, Major Rawlinson, etc. The house is full of exquisite works of art, and Mr. Ford was all wit and brilliancy".<sup>2</sup> Less than a fortnight later, she met them at the Pollocks', "where we had a very pleasant evening", and, "sitting between Mr. Pollock and Mr. Ruskin, found that the latter improved upon acquaintance".<sup>3</sup> This, however, was years before Ruskin was invited to give evidence before the Royal Commission, during her husband's Presidency of the Royal Academy, and had therefore, in her eyes, become an implacable enemy.

By the time autumn came, however, Ruskin confided to his father that every hour of talking to people was like so much shortening of his life; and most of the winter of 1850-51 was spent in writing his

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 1850: *Works*, vol. 9, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, vol. 1, p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 252.

book and in supervising the engravings of his own numerous and detailed illustrations. It was published on 3 March, 1857, in dark brown cloth enriched with gold, at the price of two guineas.

## 4

Simultaneously with the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* (which will be studied later together with the subsequent volumes) Ruskin published as a shilling pamphlet his *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds*, which at first he had intended as an appendix to the larger work; an essay valuable chiefly because of the light it throws upon the Protestant nature of his religious attitude at this time. He had already written an unpublished *Essay on Baptism*, and now he sought to refute the steadily growing Catholic theory that the Church is the sacred repository of truths which are by no means evident from the attentive reading of the Gospels themselves. His main contention was that a man becomes a member of the true invisible Church only by fervent belief in Christ, and that to consider Baptism as a sign of admission even to the visible Church is absurd, if for no other reason than that it is obvious that at least half the baptised people in the world are rogues. To the reasonable, it is not what a man professes, but how he conducts his life, which in fact determines whether or not he is a Christian, and it is to the Church's shame that it tolerates without a murmur of objection any dishonourable conduct or wilful crimes that its members choose to commit. Truth can only be discovered, and forgiveness obtained, by each man for himself; and the Sacrament should be denied to persons guilty of crime until the fault has been acknowledged and pardon besought of God. As for the schism in England between the so-called Evangelical and High Church parties, it is "enough to shake men's faith in the truth of Religion at all. For if full validity was given to the Scriptures, there would be no cause for any serious divergence of opinion at all".<sup>1</sup>

"Papa was much pleased with Mr. Ruskin's pamphlet," Charlotte Brontë wrote to her publishers, who had sent it to her with some other books, "only he thought the scheme of amalgamation suggested towards the close impracticable. For my part, I regard the *brochure* as a refreshing piece of honest writing, good sense uttered by pure lips. The Puseyite priesthood will not relish it; it strips them mercilessly of their pompous pretensions."

Although it is amusingly narrated that Ruskin received irate letters from some Caledonian farmers who had believed that the book was a practical treatise upon the care of sheep, the publication of this pamphlet brought him into close touch, by correspondence, through Dr. Furnivall, with the Rev. F. D. Maurice, with whom Ruskin was to become better acquainted in a few years' time.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 12, p. 556.

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## Chapter IV

1. "The Times'" attack on the Pre-Raphaelites: a campaign of detraction. 2. The formation of the Brotherhood: Hunt and Millais: "The Germ": Woolner writes to Patmore: Patmore and the Pre-Raphaelites: Millais goes to Patmore to enlist Ruskin's support: Ruskin's defence: satisfaction of the Brotherhood: the Ruskins meet Millais: his visit to Denmark Hill.

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I

NONE reading attentively on 7 May, 1851, that solid organ of Victorian respectability, *The Times*, could have failed to be struck by the virulence of their art critic, in his notes upon the Royal Academy, when dealing with the pictures of two young artists who had recently distinguished themselves by the unorthodox style of their work. "We cannot censure at present as amply or as strongly as we desire to do," wrote that gentleman, "the strange disorder of the mind or the eyes which continues to rage with unabated absurdity among a class of juvenile artists who style themselves P.R.B., which, being interpreted, means Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Their faith seems to consist in an absolute contempt for perspective and the known laws of light and shade, an aversion to beauty in every shape, and a singular devotion to the minute accidents of their subjects, including, or, rather, seeking out, every excess of sharpness and deformity. That morbid infatuation which sacrifices truth, beauty, and genuine feeling to mere eccentricity deserves no quarter at the hands of the public, and though the patronage of art is sometimes lavished on oddity as profusely as on higher qualities, these monkish follies have no more real claim to figure in any collection of English paintings than the aberrations of intellect which are exhibited under the name of Mr. Ward."

It was, however, but the culmination of a campaign of abuse. The previous summer, Millais' picture, *Christ in the House of his Parents*, painted with so punctilious a regard for truth that in order that the background and the muscular development of his St. Joseph should be correct in all their details, the artist had worked for days in a carpenter's shop in Oxford Street, had evoked a storm. The *Athenæum*<sup>1</sup> declared that "Mr. Millais, in his picture without a name which represents a Holy Family in the interior of the carpenter's shop, has been most careful in giving the least dignified features of his presentment, and in giving to the higher forms character and mean-

<sup>1</sup> 1 June, 1850.



ings, a circumstantial Art language from which we recoil with loathing and disgust. There are many to whom his work will seem a pictorial blasphemy. Great imitative talents have here been perverted to the use of an eccentricity both lamentable and revolting". *The Times*<sup>1</sup> also found it, "to speak plainly", both revolting and disgusting: while Dickens, in *Household Words*,<sup>2</sup> out of loyalty to his academical friends, who he was persuaded were being attacked by this juvenile revolution against contemporary standards, wrote a diatribe so humourless, so abusive, and so mercilessly unjust that, as the outraged Mrs. Millais said when she read it later, he might have remembered the reception that had been accorded to his first works when he was young and unknown. "In the foreground of that carpenter's shop," he declared, "is a hideous, wry-necked blubbering red-haired boy in a nightgown who appears to have received a poke in the hand from the stick of another boy with whom he has been playing in an adjacent gutter, and to be holding it up for the contemplation of a kneeling woman, so horrible in her ugliness that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England."<sup>3</sup> Only more abusive was *Blackwood's*, always pre-eminent at vituperation. They informed their readers that "they had great difficulty in believing a report that this unpleasing and atrociously affected picture has found a purchaser at a high price". (The picture had, indeed, been purchased by the dealer Farrer for £150; who believed so implicitly in its merits that he amused both himself and his clients by exhibiting upon the back of it all the unfavourable critiques that he could collect.)

Now, with Millais' *Mariana*, his *Woodman's Daughter* and his *Return of the Dove to the Ark*, and Hunt's *Valentine and Sylvia* attacked even more violently, it seemed to them that the position was grave indeed. To such a pitch had the clamour risen, that some of the more pious Academy students hissed when their names were mentioned in the schools; and one enemy even suggested that, having displayed how atrocious they were, instead of leaving them upon their walls until the end of the season, the authorities should forthwith remove all the Pre-Raphaelite paintings and return them to their owners.

## 2

It was now three years since a group of serious, ardent, high-spirited and talented young men had formally decided to band themselves together in order to create a renaissance in English art, and to

<sup>1</sup> 9 May, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> 15 June, 1850.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Millais, *Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (1899), vol. 1, p. 75.

imbue with new truth and life a profession that seemed to them all but submerged in stereotyped choice of subjects and dull, conventional tricks. The event happened at Millais' studio in Gower Street, one evening when they were all poring over a book of engravings (Lasimo's execrable engravings, Ruskin called them later) of the frescoes of the Campo Santo at Pisa, which Ruskin had found such a revelation—"a veritable Palestine" in 1845. So deeply impressed were the two friends, Millais and Hunt, and their companion Rossetti, that they instinctively felt that the temper that inspired the frescoes was precisely that which they were striving to nurture within themselves. Such truth and fidelity should henceforward regulate their own ambition; and (as Holman Hunt wrote later) "they insisted that the naive traits of frank expression and unaffected grace were what had made Italian Art so essentially vigorous and progressive, until the showy followers of Michael Angelo had grafted their Dead Sea fruit on to the vital tree just when it was bearing its choicest autumnal ripeness for the re-awakened world".<sup>1</sup>

It was Rossetti, with his ardent, expansive impetuosity, who had suddenly suggested, "Let's have a society": and a week later, on an evening in September, when Hunt was twenty-one, Rossetti twenty, and the prodigious Millais only nineteen, the brotherhood was solemnly inaugurated, John Everett Millais; Holman Hunt; Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his devoted brother William; Thomas Woolner, F. G. Stephens and James Collinson: these were the members, artists all with the exception of the faithful William, who acted as secretary to the society, and kept its records, as he was later to keep his private diaries, with an exemplary detachment that sometimes caused his brother to tear pages out of the minute book because he disapproved of certain references to himself. Rossetti, with his characteristic geniality, was all for including other friends. But the more prudent Hunt and Millais objected to having the brotherhood crowded with members of no proved talent; and although Arthur Hughes, Frederick Sandys, Noel Paton, Charles Collins and Walter Deverell were all sympathisers on the fringe, they were not amongst the original elected seven.

Pre-Raphaelitism! A name in which three young men of extraordinary talent and character enshrined their artistic dreams and proclaimed their fervid detestation of the mawkish and the commonplace. To Hunt "the frank worship of Nature, kept in check by selection and directed by the spirit of imaginative purpose":<sup>2</sup> to Millais a wonderful medium for exploiting his remarkable ease and power of technique: to Rossetti, a magic casement giving upon a world of strange and compelling individual imagination. At the

<sup>1</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905), vol. 1, pp. 130-1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 452.

height of their success, with the exception of Hunt, who gave it a general significance that scarcely describes the richness of its many colours, they all afterwards denied it. "A group of young fellows who couldn't draw—the visionary vanities of half a dozen boys," Rossetti called it in later years, and confided to the young Hall Caine that he had long been weary of the term.<sup>1</sup> While it was only a very few years later that Millais confided to W. B. Scott that "nature was nature and art was art, and one couldn't go on doing such stuff forever".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, between 1848 and 1854, Pre-Raphaelitism was to be the most vigorous influence in English Art, an influence which grew steadily wider and more powerful, even when Millais and Rossetti felt themselves fully emancipated from its influence, until ultimately it seemed typical of the Victorian spirit.

Hunt and Millais, who had been working and studying together in each other's studios for some time, had already decided to pursue their own revolutionary methods despite all the united protests of the Academic world. Their influence now spread quickly in a steadily widening circle: and every week, and sometimes even every night, a band of the faithful gathered to spout poetry or talk until long past midnight of art and literature, and later rush singing into the streets, where they were said to do rescue work amongst fallen women, making their rounds in groups of two and three, solemnly admonishing and persuading, and very frequently making themselves objects of open mockery.

Of course they had to have a magazine. With one great poet already of their number, and several others who could versify with considerable skill (indeed, so versatile and so accomplished were these exuberant young men that even Millais, just to assure Rossetti that he too could shine as a poet had he wished, on one occasion suddenly seized a slate and without pause filled both sides with rhyming couplets which he then proceeded to read out—"Devilish good it was, too," said Rossetti later to Valentine Prinsep), it was as inevitable that the *Germ* should take shape, as it was inevitable that, financed as it was by the combined efforts of its mostly impecunious sponsors, it should never survive a second number.

It was at one of the earlier meetings of the Brotherhood that an incident occurred which was to have deep and far reaching consequences in the lives of many people. Dante Rossetti, who had been amongst the first to admire and to discuss Patmore's little known volume of poems published in 1844, in that low, sonorous and expressive voice that held in it such magic that, until the end of his life, it cast a spell upon innumerable men of talent, had been reciting *The Woodman's Daughter*, when Woolner, poetaster as well as sculptor, lamented that the poem was now no longer obtainable at the publish-

<sup>1</sup> Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiographical Notes of W. B. Scott*, ed. W. Miuto, vol. 1, p. 278.

ers. "Why not write to Patmore and ask him to send you a copy?" suggested Rossetti, who himself wrote without a second thought to any poet or painter who captured his imagination; and frequently received amiable replies which resulted ultimately in friendship. Upon this suggestion, after they had walked down Stanhope Street, with Rossetti singing *Mourir pour la patrie*, and the rest of them lustily joining in the chorus, Woolner went home and carefully composed a note of appreciation. As yet but little known, save for a few brother poets, but always susceptible to sympathy and appreciation, Patmore reciprocated by an invitation to dine. So Woolner went diffidently out to The Grove, Highgate, and was charmingly received in that small house which very soon was to become a meeting place for as many distinguished poets as had, a few decades before, foregathered at the imposing St. James' house of Samuel Rogers. Before long, he had introduced to the Patmores the entire circle of his Pre-Raphaelite brothers. Allingham, visiting for the first time a fellow poet with whom he had already been in eager correspondence, recorded, a few months later, his impression of that remarkable little establishment presided over by the woman who was, after her premature death, to become famous throughout England as *The Angel in the House*. "Neat small house on left hand side of road, near a railway bridge. Mrs. Patmore—Emily. Tea and cake. Two small sitting-rooms with folding door between: front room has engraved portraits of Wordsworth and Faraday over the mantelpiece ('the two greatest men of our time'), a round table with ten or a dozen books, and plaster cast of a statuette of Puck—just alighted on a mushroom and about to push with his toe a bewildered frog which a snake is on the point of snapping up. You can see that he saves the frog out of fun, mostly, and to tease the snake. He is a sturdy elf, plainly, yet not humanly masculine. A very original bit of work by 'a young artist named Woolner'. In the back room, P.'s writing-table at the window, with a few bookshelves beside it. I noticed Coleridge's *Table Talk* and *Aids to Reflection*, and Keats' *Remains*."<sup>1</sup> Patmore himself, as that other contemporary diarist, William Rossetti, saw him, was "a tall rather thin young man, with a protrusive nose and a large mouth, and a general aspect more suggestive of a wit than of a poet. He had a trick of blinking his eyes and smiling a smile in which some self-opinion spiced a predominance of sarcasm. In manner he was a little dry, but always pleasant and friendly within my observation."<sup>2</sup> "A year or two older than the oldest P.R.B. (he wrote later), we all looked up to him much for his performance in poetry, his general intellectual insight and maturity and his knowledge of important persons whom we came to know through him—Tennyson in particular."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Allingham: *A Diary*, by H. Allingham and D. Radford (1907), pp. 53-4.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 83-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, by Basil Champneys, vol. 1, p. 83.

Years later, Patmore's own commentaries upon the Pre-Raphaelites, considering the extraordinary distinction that several of them attained, were apt to be curiously patronising. He remembered them, he wrote, when they were little more than boys together—all very simple, pure-minded, ignorant and confident. He remembered Millais being looked up to as in some sort their leader—principally because he had greater command of money than the others, who were very poor. He remembered Millais triumphantly flourishing before his eyes the cheque for £150 which he received for *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*: remembered Hunt, at one of the Brotherhood's meetings, offering a number of sketches to anyone who would buy them for a pound apiece: remembered Rossetti selling a little drawing of a boy and girl dancing before a Borgia for £5, which shortly afterwards Monckton-Milnes commissioned him to try to buy for him for £100.

At the time, however, it is clear that he held them in considerable esteem, for he wrote to Allingham how a few artists, "for the most part illustrious, tho' as yet obscure", had "set agoing a small magazine upon a sound system". Eagerly he praised the first number with its good poetry, notable criticism, and its exquisite etching by Hunt. He cautiously suggested that Allingham should become one of the corporation, subscribing a shilling a number and contributing free, and modestly announced that a little poem called *The Seasons* was his own.

Although Patmore later considered that he had no particular right to the claim, he admitted that, such was their admiration, the Pre-Raphaelites generally considered him as their representative in the sphere of poetry. Certainly, between 1849 and 1853 there was a warm friendship between them, and a good deal of mutual admiration. Millais was delighted to paint the portrait of Emily Augusta, and such was Patmore's gratification that the painter had high hopes that it might be shown to Tennyson, in order that he should give him permission to paint his wife.

Thus, aware that Patmore was acquainted with Ruskin, it was of the celebrated critic that Millais immediately thought when he saw the latest diatribe against himself and his friends. Brilliantly gifted as he was, from the days that he had received his first medal from the Society of Arts at the age of nine, and the following year entered the Royal Academy as the youngest student ever admitted,—where he was nicknamed *The Child*, he had been used to the appreciation and flattery of such influential veterans as Rogers, to say nothing of the almost reverent devotion of parents whose chief aim in life had been the education of his remarkable talents. He was therefore far more indignant, and more deeply wounded in his self-esteem, than the industrious and less favoured Hunt, who was used to frustration and to parental opposition. Hunt courageously continued to go his own way even when he could scarcely afford the coppers to stamp his correspondence, and was often enough delayed in beginning a new

picture for lack of money with which to buy the necessary materials.

It was Millais, therefore, who rushed out to the little house in Highgate in a great state of dudgeon, and poured out his grievances to the sympathetic Patmore, whose poem had supplied subject and title for one of the derided paintings. Patmore, a far more genial and generous hearted friend than some of his later reminiscences would lead one to suppose, forthwith approached Ruskin, who, his natural belligerence, no less than his natural generosity, immediately aroused, ordered the carriage and drove to the Academy in order to re-examine with punctilious care the egregious paintings which were arousing so much censure.

In actual fact, he had, so far, seen nothing of the young Pre-Raphaelite painters which had deeply impressed him in their favour. Only the previous season, Dyce had, when meeting him at the Academy, taken him by the arm and planted him almost forcibly before the much discussed *Christ in the House of his Parents*. But he had noticed little in it to single out either for particular praise or blame. But a further examination soon made it clear that, despite any idiosyncrasies of manner, the paintings of both Hunt and Millais showed extraordinary technical ability and power; and the following day he penned a long letter on the subject to *The Times*. The first draft of this letter, indeed, was so caustic, that John James, to whom Ruskin still deferred in all such matters, advised him not to send it: whereupon he meekly sat down at his desk again to compose another.

When his article did not immediately appear, he wrote (it was still only 10 May) to Patmore, in order to reassure him and his friends, that he had despatched his letter yesterday, but as it went late, that might account for its non-appearance. If, however, it did not appear by the following Monday, he would compose another letter to the *Chronicle*, in a somewhat less polite form. Meantime, he had interested his father in the young men. John James had written to enquire whether the ark picture was unsold, and if so, what was its price: while he himself would like Hunt to let him know his price for *Valentine*, as he might perhaps be of some service to him.

Patmore immediately told his friends of Ruskin's interest in the affair, and the young Pre-Raphaelite brothers were naturally in a suppressed turmoil of excitement. William Rossetti, conscientiously writing up the Brotherhood's diary, entered under 8 to 10 May: "On Saturday Hunt, Gabriel and I met at Hannay's; when Hunt informed us (having it from Patmore) that Ruskin had wished to buy Millais' picture of *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*, which is already sold; and that Patmore has suggested to him to write something about the P.R.B. Indeed, so desirable would something of the kind be that it had been proposed among ourselves to write to Ruskin requesting him to express his opinion in a public manner."<sup>1</sup> Two days later, he

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, p. 299.

recorded that "Woolner explained to him that it was Ruskin's *father* who wanted to buy Millais' picture, but this made little difference in the state of the case. Ruskin himself had, in conformity with Patmore's suggestion, written a letter to *The Times* on the P.R.B., and, if it did not appear there, would send it to the *Chronicle*. This ought to be worth something to them."<sup>1</sup> Hunt wrote with characteristic solemnity and decorum to Patmore to thank him for his part in the affair. "He was delighted to hear that Ruskin had taken the field in defence of Millais and himself, for he had almost despaired of ever overcoming the violent opposition to their style which the example of *The Times* and other influential papers were breeding. If they had merely confined their remarks to a just spirit of criticism it would have been all fair: but when they endeavoured to ruin their interest with the Academy and the patrons, it was necessary that some notice should be taken, and to have that done by Ruskin was of all things what he could most desire. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Then, on the following day, Ruskin's long letter, with its characteristic detachment and astringent humour, was printed in *The Times* in full.

"Sir," he had written. "Your usual liberality will, I trust, give a place in your columns to this expression of my regret that the tone of the critique which appeared in *The Times* of Wednesday last on the works of Mr. Millais and Mr. Hunt, now in the Royal Academy, should have been scornful as well as severe.

"I regret it, first, because the mere labour bestowed on those works, and their fidelity to a certain order of truth (labour and fidelity which are altogether indisputable), ought at once to have placed them above the level of mere contempt; and, secondly, because I believe these young artists to be at a most critical period of their career—at a turning point, from which they may either sink into nothingness or rise to very real greatness; and I believe also, that whether they choose the upward or the downward path, may in no small degree depend upon the character of the criticism which their works have to sustain. . . .

"Let me state, in the first place, that I have no acquaintance with any of these artists, and very imperfect sympathy with them. No one who has met any of my writings will suspect me of desiring to encourage them in their Romanist and Tractarian tendencies. I am glad to see that Mr. Millais' lady in blue is heartily tired of her painted window and idolatrous toilet table; and I have no particular respect for Mr. Collins' lady in white, because her sympathies are limited to a dead wall, or divided between some goldfish and a tadpole—(the latter Mr. Collins may, perhaps, permit me to suggest *en passant*, as he is already half a frog, is rather too small for his age). But I happen

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Champneys, *Memoirs of Coventry Patmore*, vol. 2, p. 318.

to have a special acquaintance with the water plant, *Alisona plantago*, among which the said goldfish are swimming; and as I never saw it so thoroughly well drawn, I must take leave to remonstrate with you, when you say sweepingly that these men 'sacrifice *truth* as well as feeling to eccentricity', for, as a mere botanical study of the water lily and *Alisona*, as well as of the common lily and of several other garden flowers, this picture would be invaluable to me, and I heartily wish it were mine.

"But, before entering into such particulars, let me correct an impression which your article is likely to induce in most minds, and which is altogether false. These Pre-Raphaelites (I cannot compliment them on common sense in choice of a *nom de guerre*) do *not* desire nor pretend in any way to imitate antique painting as such. They know very little of ancient paintings who suppose the works of these young artists to resemble them. As far as I can judge of their aim—for, as I said, I do not know the men themselves—the Pre-Raphaelites intend to surrender no advantage which the knowledge or inventions of the present time can afford to their art. They intend to return to early days in this one point only—that, as far as in them lies, they will draw either what they see, or what they suppose might have been the actual facts of the scene they desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture-making; and they have chosen their unfortunate though not inaccurate name because all artists did this before Raphael's time, and after Raphael's time did *not* this, but sought to paint fair pictures, rather than represent stern facts; of which the consequence has been that, from Raphael's time to this day, historical art has been in acknowledged decadence. . . .

"Now, sir, presupposing that the intention of these men was to return to archaic *art* instead of to archaic *honesty*, your critic borrows Fuseli's expression regarding ancient draperies 'swapped instead of folded', and asserts that in these pictures there is a 'servile imitation of *false* perspective'. To which I have just this answer:—

"That there is not one single error in perspective in four out of the five pictures in question; and that in Millais' *Mariana* there is but this one—that the top of the green curtain in the distant window has too low a vanishing point; and that I will undertake, if need be, to point out and prove a dozen worse errors in perspective in any twelve pictures, containing architecture, taken at random from among the works of the popular painters of the day.

"Secondly: that, putting aside the small Mulready, and the works of Thorburn and Sir W. Ross, and perhaps some others of those in the miniature room which I have not examined, there is not a single study of drapery in the whole Academy, be it in large works or small, which for perfect truth, power, and finish could be compared for an instant with the black sleeve of the Julia, or with the velvet on the breast and the chain mail of the Valentine, of Mr. Hunt's picture; or with



the white draperies on the table of Mr. Millais' *Mariana*, and in the right-hand figure in the same painter's *Dove Returning to the Ark*.

"And further: that as studies both of drapery and of every minor detail, there has been nothing in art so earnest or so complete as these pictures since the days of Albert Dürer. This I assert generally and fearlessly. On the other hand, I am perfectly ready to admit that Mr. Hunt's *Sylvia* is not a person whom Proteus or anyone else would have been likely to fall in love with at first sight; and that one cannot feel very sincere delight that Mr. Millais' *Wives of the Sons of Noah* should have escaped the Deluge; with many other faults besides on which I will not enlarge at present, because I have already occupied too much of your valuable space, and I hope to enter into more special criticism in a future letter. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Waiting eagerly, and opening with trembling hands every issue of *The Times* that had recently appeared, the young Pre-Raphaelites read this article with gratitude and relief. "Altogether the letter is very satisfactory," William Rossetti recorded officially on 13 to 15 May, "anything but unqualified praise, which is well in one sense, as doing away with the accusation of partisanship. Ruskin himself expressly disclaims personal acquaintance."<sup>2</sup> And the day following the letter's appearance, a council of the Brotherhood was summoned at Millais'. Even Brown was there, beside Hunt and the two Rossettis. The matter was warmly discussed from every point of view, and the question was raised, in accordance with a suggestion put forward by Patmore, as to whether or not they should send Ruskin a letter of thanks. Finally they decided that this seemed "of doubtful propriety, as it might be interpreted into making interest with a view to his second letter. When that was out, however, something of the kind would certainly appear right."<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, it was Hunt, and not Millais, who once more undertook with formal gravity to thank Patmore for his part in the affair, and to tell him their decision of not, for the present, writing direct to their distinguished champion. "I have thought, as there is a promise of a second letter," he wrote, "that it would be better not to thank Mr. Ruskin until that has appeared, so that he would, if necessary, be able to say that he is not in communication with us, which fact, it is evident, gave his first letter so much more importance than if it could have been said to result from friendly motives. If you think it will be better to write at once, send me one word, and I shall consider it a kind of privilege to be allowed to thank him for his able defence—which already I perceive has had a great effect in our favour, and without which I felt we should have been positively ruined."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 13 May, 1851.

<sup>2</sup> Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Champneys, *Memoir of Coventry Patmore*, vol. 2, pp. 318-19.

When Patmore wrote to tell Ruskin of the gratitude of the young painters, Ruskin replied: "I am very glad your friends were pleased with the letter. I wrote a continuation of it, which I have not sent—because to people who did not know that there are not ten pictures in the Academy which I would turn my head to look at—it might have read carping. But I wish, *entre nous*, you would ask Millais whether it would have been quite impossible for him to have got a bit of olive branch out of some of our conservatories—instead of painting one on speculation—or at least ascertained to some approximation what an olive leaf was like: and also, whether he has ever in his life seen a bit of old painted glass, near? and what modern stuff it was he studied from? Pray tell Hunt how happy I shall be to be allowed to see his picture. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the month, there appeared in *The Times* Ruskin's second letter, even more detailed than the first, in which he carefully enumerated what he considered to be the defects in the Pre-Raphaelite pictures on exhibition at the Academy "partly for the consideration of the painters themselves" and "partly that forgiveness of them may be asked from the public in consideration of high merits in other respects". Having pointed these out with a penetrating and impartial accuracy leavened by his characteristic raillery, he concluded with solemn benevolence: "And so I wish them all heartily good speed, believing in sincerity that if they temper the courage and energy which they have shown in the adoption of their system with patience and discretion in framing it, and if they do not suffer themselves to be driven by harsh or careless criticism into rejection of the ordinary means of obtaining influence over the minds of others, they may, as they gain experience, lay in our England the foundations of a school of art nobler than the world has seen for three hundred years."<sup>2</sup>

Still Hunt soberly insisted upon leaving a decent interval to make sure that they would not be influencing in any degree or manner the judgment of the writer: then the two young men set themselves to write as graceful and appreciative a letter as they could in order to cozen the influential Mr. Ruskin into an even more active interest in their work. Selecting Millais' address in Gower Street, rather than Hunt's in Prospect Place, as being the more imposing heading, they were so successful in their efforts that, no sooner had he read their letter, than Ruskin determined to call and make the acquaintance of the two young painters without delay. He was not, as it happened, too deeply absorbed in any demanding task of composition; so, ordering the carriage and inviting Effie to accompany him on the expedition, he set out for Bloomsbury the same day as the letter arrived.

The visit was an unqualified success. Though Hunt, unfortunately, was not available, Millais was both gratified and delighted by the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 288-9.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 30 May, 1851.

honour paid him by so distinguished a man and his elegant and charming wife. And the distinguished critic and his elegant and charming wife were no less delighted with Millais. This was inevitable. For Millais, still but twenty-two, already combined the sensibility of the painter with the graceful manners of the man of the world, that made Rossetti, in his characteristic slangy manner, dub him a "great swell". Lacking the deep integrity and the force of character of Holman Hunt, lacking the fire and the passionate imagination of Rossetti, Millais was nevertheless possessed of a remarkable charm, both of manner and appearance. "He always looked so beautiful—tall, slender, but strong, crowned with an ideal head," Arthur Hughes wrote of him years later: and Valentine Prinsep, who met him first in 1854, was no less eulogious. "Tall, thin and active, his cager, handsome face, his clustering curls of dark hair, and his keen, bright eye—his whole presence—betokened a boyish energy that was quite remarkable."<sup>1</sup> William Rossetti, that truthful and impartial recorder, wrote him down as "a very handsome, or more strictly a beautiful youth";<sup>2</sup> whose face came nearer to the type which we term angelic than perhaps any other male visage that he had seen. "His voice hardly corresponded to his countenance; it was harsh rather than otherwise. In talk he was something of what one calls 'a rattle'; saying sprightly things in an offhand way, but not entering into anything claiming the name of conversation. He sometimes started a subject, but never developed it. We all entertained the highest estimate of what he had now set about doing, and what else he was certain to achieve in a short time. In this sense he led us all, and moreover we had a genuine personal liking for him: yet I do not think that Millais, as 'a man and a brother', ever stood quite so high with us as Holman Hunt did."<sup>3</sup>

Always confident of his extraordinary gifts, but engagingly diffident now, at a moment when he was fully aware that this meeting might prove to be a crucial event in his career; by temperament conventional, and by nature insatiably ambitious; pride and deference were mingled in a candour that was tempered with courtesy, and triumph and excitement in a friendliness that was completely without affectation. Used to admiration, to attention, both from his family and from strangers, he could accept the greatest compliments without embarrassment, enjoy the greatest favours with a disarming ease. Thus, when his visitors suggested that he should accompany them home for a short stay, he accepted the invitation with an agreeable simplicity. His parents were delighted for him to go; but doubtless he would have gone all the same even had they objected, just as, the previous Christmas, he had visited the Combes at Oxford, although, as he explained to his hosts when accepting the invitation, "his family were

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Millais*, vol. 2, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

a little astonished on hearing of his intention to leave them at that time”.

Already Millais had an infallible instinct for any action that might help him towards worldly success. So he drove back to spend a week with the Ruskins at Denmark Hill, and very soon the young painter was writing to Mrs. Combe that he and Ruskin were “such good friends that his host wished him to accompany him to Switzerland this summer”.<sup>1</sup> “. . . We are as yet singularly at variance in our opinions upon art. One of our differences is about Turner. He believes that I shall be converted on further acquaintance with his works, and I think he will gradually slacken in his admiration.”

Since the young painter had already made plans for the summer, he was unable to accept Ruskin's invitation; but his visit so confirmed in Ruskin's mind the importance of the new school, that he added a postscript bearing upon it to the new edition of the first volume of *Modern Painters* that he was now preparing for the press. “I would further insist,” he concluded this treatise, “on all that is advanced in these paragraphs, with special reference to the admirable, though strange, pictures of Mr. Millais and Mr. Holman Hunt: and to the principles exemplified in the efforts of other members of a society which unfortunately, or rather unwisely, has given itself the name of Pre-Raphaelite; unfortunately, because the principles on which its members are working are neither pre- nor post-Raphaelite, but everlasting. They are endeavouring to paint, with the highest possible degree of completion, what they see in nature, without reference to conventional or established rules, but by no means to imitate the style of any past epoch. Their works are, in finish of drawing, and in splendour of colour, the best in the Royal Academy; and I have great hope that they may become the foundation of a more earnest and able school of art than we have seen for centuries.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Millais*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 3, p. 621.

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## Chapter V

1. *Venice again: social distractions: Effie's success: the pains of research: failure to secure two Tintorets for the National Gallery.* 2. *Death of Turner: his will: Ruskin plans a Turner Gallery: the will contested: Ruskin resigns his executorship.* 3. *Letters to "The Times": John James' disapproval.* 4. *A religious experience.* 5. *Plans for the future: difficulties with Effie: her dislike of quiet: John James buys his son a house at Herne Hill.* 6. *The theft of Effie's jewels: departure from Venice.*

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I

BY NOW the best of the season was over. Compelled to return to Venice for the winter, in order to collect more material for *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin and his wife, with "George" and a maid, set out from home on 4 August. They spent a leisurely four weeks in accomplishing the journey, falling in with several friends on their way: at Paris, the Rev. Mr. Moore, the incumbent of Camden Church, Camberwell, and his wife: at Geneva Charles Newton, and at Champagnole a married sister of Osborne Gordon, and her husband. Ruskin showed everyone his favourite haunts, and even tried to keep accounts for the whole party; and, as usual in company, Effie was in excellent spirits, at the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard making the monks play and sing "not Gregorian chants merely, but very merry and unclerical tunes".<sup>1</sup>

"I am sitting with Effie in the outside balcony of the Hotel Royal," Ruskin wrote his father on 28 August. "Newton is kicking my chair, so that I cannot write so well as usual, the soft air of the afternoon is just breathing past, and no more, and a subdued sunshine resting on the red roofs high above us, and on some streaks of white cloud which cross the arches of a campanile far down the narrow street. Effie is in a state of intense delight at being again in Italy, and poor Newton in much sorrow at having to go away by diligence to-morrow, and I am very sorry for him, for it would be very distressful to myself—I don't think I ever enjoyed Italy so much. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

This time, instead of staying at a hotel, they took a furnished apartment belonging to the Baroness Witzler in the Campo Santa Maria Zobenigo, comprising "a room for him to write in, a kind of hall dining-room, a beautiful drawing-room, double bedroom and dressing-room, three servants' rooms and kitchen, on the Grand Canal,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 28.8.1857: *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxv.

with south aspect, nearly opposite the Salute";<sup>1</sup> all on first floor, and for about £17 a month. Soon he was writing to tell his father that he was settled more quietly than he had ever been since he was at college, and it certainly would be nobody's fault but his own if he did not write well. . . . "For the first time in my life, I feel to be living really in my own house. For I never *lived* at any place that I loved before and have been either enduring the locality or putting up with somewhat rough habitation."<sup>2</sup>

As usual, Ruskin devoted the greater part of his time to gliding about in gondolas: to poking and peering: to drawing architectural details in dim churches, or perched precariously upon the tops of ladders: to reading in libraries, conversing with sacristans, and filling his notebook with detailed notes and thumbnail diagrams. But there were many, and other diversions. There was the society of Rawdon Brown and of Edward Cheney (who, twenty years before, in Rome, had been the friend of Scott)—both Anglo-Italians of great experience and charm of manner, men of the world of culture and taste, who cared, not only for old pictures, old buildings, and old books, but even more for the graces of society, and the bouquet of fine vintage wines: there were English painters such as David Roberts, busy preparing paintings of Venice for the exhibition, who found the Ruskin sherry like the best painting "at once tender and expressive";<sup>3</sup> there was Sir Gilbert Scott, who came to tea and participated in a "great architectural seance";<sup>4</sup> there were the Bishop of Oxford and the Dean of St. Paul's: there was Lord Dufferin, who paddled about the lagoons, and even put to sea, in his india-rubber boat; and there was Mr. Gibbs, the tutor of the Prince of Wales, who received from Ruskin many lengthy dissertations upon the proper education of future kings.

Austria had recently brought to Venice much of the gaiety and elegance of Vienna: and there were also social distractions of a more spectacular kind: gala nights at the opera, with brilliant military dress uniforms and women blazing with diamonds: masked balls and brilliant receptions to do honour to such distinguished visitors as the Duchesse de Berri, Henri Cinq, or the Infanta of Spain: and an illuminated water party to welcome the Emperor of Austria.

"Everybody on the Grand Canal was asked by the municipality to illuminate their houses *inside*: and the Rialto was done at the public expense," Ruskin told his father. "They spent altogether in Bengal lights and other lamps about three hundred pounds—a large sum for Venice in these days—but I never saw the Rialto look so lovely. There were no devices or letters or nonsense on it—only the lines of its *architecture* traced in chains of fire, and two lines of bright ruby lamps

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 7.9.1857: *Works*, vol. 10, pp. xxviii-xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 24.9.1851: *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxix.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

set along its arch underneath, so as to light the vault of it; all streaming down in bright reflection on the Canal. In the Canal itself, the boats were jammed so close that there was scarcely room for each boatman to get his oar into the water. Here, amongst the gay crowd, with singing and jesting around them, and Bengal lights burning among the boats, with the torchlight glittering in the air and coruscating upon the water, and the innumerable beaks of the gondolas, reared up with their strange curving crests like a whole field full of dragons", Ruskin stood, bareheaded, with his wife beside him, until the Emperor appeared. Then the rush towards him was so great, that presently they crashed against the very sides of the royal boat, and were stuck so until the gondolier, deftly extricating them, kept their place by the Emperor's side for over a quarter of an hour, though so pressed by the crowd that sometimes it was impossible not to splash him.<sup>1</sup>

In all these scenes Effie played a prominent part. When a High Admiral came to launch a boat, it was she who gave the signal. At the brilliant reception of Marshal Radetsky, she was the acknowledged *reine du bal*, and was afterwards presented to the Maréchale and to the Archduke Charles Ferdinand; later she was presented with a signed photograph of the courteous and illustrious host. Presently taken up by a Countess Palavicini, a German married to an Italian, through her she was soon introduced to the most distinguished society, who, so Ruskin wrote proudly to his father, found her the more charming in that she lacked the usual English stiffness and reserve. She was presented to Archduke Albert, son of the great Archduke Charles, who came afterwards to tea "in the quietest English domestic way":<sup>2</sup> she shone at the Austrian Officers' Carnival Ball, where the Grand Duchess Constantine, magnificently attired in a dress of lace over rose brocade, with a row of emeralds each the size of a small walnut clasping the dress from neck to waist, sat upon a sort of throne at the end of the room with her ladies behind her and a circle of officers in front, as though she were a queen. Though Ruskin had had enough of the festivities by half past ten, he indulgently left her to enjoy herself in her own way, and, when she returned at half past one, informed his father that he thought it "very moderate".<sup>3</sup>

At Verona, Marshal Radetsky insisted upon placing his carriage at the service of the beautiful Mrs. Ruskin and her husband, so that whenever they drove out they had the pleasure of seeing "the young men's riding—the nice, loose, cavalry balanced, swinging seat, and the horses as happy as their masters, but keeping their place beside the carriage to a hair's breadth".<sup>4</sup> Although gaieties such as these soon palled on him, there is no doubt that Ruskin welcomed them for

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 3.10.1851: Wilenski, *John Ruskin*, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 20.11.1851: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 19.2.1852: Wilenski, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

Effie's sake. "I am pleased with the young men; they are so high bred—so light-hearted—and so fond of each other, as well as desirous in every way to oblige us," he wrote to his father from Verona on 15 June. "Effie is a great catch for them as they have no ladies' society here except one or two of the wives of the generals, who are very kind but are forced to be always *en grande dame*."<sup>1</sup>

Despite these distractions, Ruskin managed to work at his book, and also to divert himself by studying "the aquatic inhabitants of the lagoons, of anomalous and indescribable characters, represented mainly by the cuttlefish, with whom I have a species of sympathy on account of his pen and ink: and the sea horse, whom I like much better than a land horse, chiefly because having no legs, there is no chance of his coming down on his knees".<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately many of his impressions soon became deadened by the absorbed attention that he was compelled to give to even the most uninspiring details of his work. "I went through so much hard, dry, mechanical toil there," he was to write to Charles Eliot Norton seven years later, "that I quite lost, before I left it, the charm of the place. Analysis is an abominable business. I am quite sure that people who work out subjects thoroughly are disagreeable wretches. One only feels as one should when one doesn't know much about the matter. If I could give you for a few minutes, as you are floating up the canal just now, the kind of feeling I had when I had just put down my work, when Venice presented itself to me merely as so many 'mouldings', and I had few associations with any building but those of more or less pain and puzzle and provocation:—pain of frost-bitten finger and chilled throat as I examined and drew the window-sills in the wintry air; puzzlement from said window-sills which didn't agree with the doorsteps, or back of house which wouldn't agree with the front; and provocation from every sort of soul or thing in Venice at once. . . . There was only one place in Venice which I never lost the feeling of joy in,—at least the pleasure which is better than joy; and that was just half way between the end of the Giudecca and St. George of the seaweed, at sunset. If you tie your boat to one of the posts there you can see the Euganean Sea, where the sun goes down; and all the Alps and Venice behind you by the rosy sunlight: there is no other spot so beautiful. . . . I have got all the right feeling back now, however; and hope to write a word or two about Venice yet, when I have got the mouldings well out of my head—and the mud. For the fact is, with reverence be it spoken, that whereas Rogers says: 'There is a glorious city in the sea,' a truthful person must say, 'There is a glorious city in the mud.' It is startling at first to say so, but it goes well enough with marble. 'Oh Queen of Marble and of Mud.'"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.6.1852: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxxv.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of May 1859: *Works*, vol. 9, xxvii-xxix.



Ruskin had another reason for vexation at this time. He had interested himself in trying to persuade the Trustees of the National Gallery to buy two Tintorets which he admired, for the national collection, for the moderate sum of £12,000. But the Trustees, evidently sceptical as to Ruskin's capacity, applied to Edward Cheney for particulars of the paintings in question, and he expressed doubts as to their being worth the sum Ruskin had stipulated. Since the Trustees had not "sufficient means of arriving at their true value", they therefore requested Sir Charles Eastlake to be "so obliging as to communicate to Mr. Ruskin their unwillingness that he should further proceed in this matter".<sup>1</sup> This was one of the many occasions upon which Ruskin's valuable gratuitous services were to be rejected chiefly on account of the scornful shafts in his works at national institutions; and it is small wonder that he was disgruntled over the affair.

## 2

During the Summer Exhibition of 1851, Turner had exhibited nothing at the Royal Academy, and *The Times* of 3 May, now that it had younger men to bait, remarked augustly that "We miss those works of inspiration". "*We miss! Who misses?*" Ruskin had enquired bitterly in a postscript to the new edition of the first volume of *Modern Painters* he had been preparing for the press. "The population of England rolls by to weary itself in the great bazaars of Kensington, little thinking that a day will come when those veiled vestals and prancing amazons, and goodly merchandise of precious stones and gold, will all be forgotten as though they had not been, but that the light which has faded from the walls of the Academy is one which millions of Koh-i-Noors could not rekindle, and that the year 1857 will, in the far future, be remembered less for what it has displayed than for what it has withdrawn."<sup>2</sup>

Six months later, on 19 December, in a small house in Chelsea, Turner died with a shaft of sunlight falling on his face, murmuring: "The Sun is God". Ruskin heard from his father of the death of his "earthly master" nine days later. "I was quite prepared for it," he wrote candidly in reply, "and am perhaps more relieved than distressed by it—though saddened."<sup>3</sup> He gave his father careful instructions as to what he should try to buy. For five or six hundred pounds he might perhaps get the original sketches of all the Swiss drawings done since 1841. Ruskin knew the meaning of those sketches. He also knew that few others save himself would value them.

Presently he received details of Turner's will, which was now the

<sup>1</sup> *National Gallery Return*, 1847-52, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 3, p. 631.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 28.12.1851: *Works*, vol. 13, p. xxii.

talk of all artistic London. "Turner's funeral on Tuesday was a very grand one," Lady Eastlake recorded on 2 January, 1852, "and, at the Academy dinner last night, the will was freely talked of. It is a very stupid will—that of a man who lived out of the world of sense and public opinion. The bulk of the property goes to build alms houses for decayed oil-painters—a class who, if good for anything, can never want alms houses. His finished pictures are left to the national gallery, if a room is built for them. (Otherwise the contents of his house in Queen Anne Street were to be kept intact, and if, in ten years, the National Gallery did not build a new wing, this was to be used as a Turner Gallery.) To his own only daughter he has not left a penny, though his housekeeper gets £150 a year. He has left a professorship of £60 a year (if the fund be sufficient) for landscape-painting to the Royal Academy; and to his eight executors £20 each (they having immense trouble), or rather £19 19s. to save the legacy duty. His life is proved to have been sordid in the extreme, and far from respectable. . . . His executors consist of Hardwick, Charles Turner (no relation), Ruskin, Munro, Stokes, Jones, Mr. Roberts, and a Mr. Harper, a relative. A sum of £1000 is to be spent on his monument, and not far short of that must have been spent for his funeral. ..." <sup>1</sup>

What Lady Eastlake omitted to state was that, besides the endowment of a professorship in landscape, Turner had also left further sums to provide a gold medal for the best landscape, to be awarded every two or three years; and to provide an annual official dinner to commemorate his birthday. Besides which he had made a special point of leaving to the National Gallery his two pictures *Dido building Carthage* and *Sun Rising through Mist*, formerly in the Tablay Collection, on the express condition that they were always to be exhibited between two pictures of Claude's—*The Seaport* and *The Mill*.

John James, visiting the studio in Queen Anne Street shortly after the painter's death, found himself impressed "as with nothing else since Pompeii", at the paintings, valued at over £80,000, that crowded the dismal, dingy house. "Boxes, half as big as your study table, filled with drawings and sketches," he told his son: "copies of *Liber Studiorum* to fill all your drawers and more, and house walls of proof plates in reams. The drawing-room has, it is reckoned, £25,000 of proofs, sketches, drawings and prints. . . . I saw in Turner's rooms Morlands and Wilsons and Claudes and portraits—all by Turner." <sup>2</sup> And bitterly he felt it that some of this prodigality of material, much of which henceforward would be doubtless left to rot, could not have been given to his son, who would have cherished it with fitting care and veneration. "No one can say you were paid to praise," <sup>3</sup> he

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, vol. 1, pp. 272-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 13, p. xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin*, p. 136.

commented caustically, when he told his son of his nineteen guineas legacy and that he was named as one of the executors of the will.

"You say Turner kept his treasures to rot, not knowing or understanding the good it would be to give me some," Ruskin wrote in reply. "Yes, but in the same way I myself, through sheer ignorance of the mighty power of those Swiss drawings, suffered the opportunity of his chief energy to pass by, and only got the two—St. Gothard and Goldau. Had I had the least idea at the time of the real power of these sketches, I should have gone down on my knees to you night after night, till I had prevailed on you to let me have all that Turner would do. But I *knew it not*; I thought them beautiful, but sketchy and imperfect compared with his former works. This was not *my fault*. It was the necessary condition of my mind in its progress to perfect judgment, yet it had this irrevocably fatal effect—leaving in my heart through my whole life the feeling of irremediable loss, such as would, if I were not to turn my thoughts away from it, become in my 'memory a rooted sorrow'. I am thankful, indeed, for what I have got, but it is the kind of thankfulness of a man who has saved the fourth or fifth of his dearest treasures from a great shipwreck—it needs some philosophy not to think of what he has lost. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

At Turner's bequest to the nation Ruskin was full of excitement, and although he expressed pain at all the sketches hung forever out of his reach, the fact that he would henceforward be able to see all the master's work in London "free of private drawing-rooms" gave him infinite satisfaction. The one thing he needed to make him perfectly happy was that his fellow executors should make him curator of the proposed new galleries, and give him the task of arranging, illustrating and explaining the whole collection. Indeed, he even hoped that the National Gallery would decline to build a new wing, but leave the executors of the will to do it; and that a year or so would elapse before it was begun, so that he could have the management of the scheme. Meantime, he amused himself by planning a gallery such as would serve as model and prototype for all future picture galleries.

Then, while Ruskin was at the height of his enthusiasm, news came that the will was to be contested. Instead of employing a proper solicitor, Turner had had it drawn up by incompetent clerks, and, in its existing form, it proved to be invalid—the main bequest for founding "a charitable Institution for the maintenance and support of Poor and Decayed Male Artists, being born in England and of English Parents only and lawful issue"<sup>2</sup> being incompatible with the Charitable Uses Act of George III. Realising that the litigation would be prolonged and productive of little save annoyance, Ruskin

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 9. 1. 1852: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 125–6.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 13, p. xxix.

wrote to ask his father to get him released from his executorship as soon as possible. His discharge was presently granted, and it was to be five years before the will was settled, and he once more flung himself wholeheartedly into Turner's cause.

## 3

Meanwhile, during the winter in Venice, Ruskin's mind had again been drawn in a direction which foreshadowed much of his work of the future. One day, while reading the newspaper, he was struck by the incompatibility of the news in three parallel columns. The first announced the death of a young girl, who had just given birth to a child, from exposure from lying all night upon the bank of an English canal; the second contained an elaborate account of satin skirts of the latest fashion; and the third, the death of a child after being burned, because a surgeon refused to attend it without a special order from the Parish. The contrast between riches and poverty, usually withheld from him since he saw so much of the one and so little of the other, struck him anew with a sudden shock, and he turned his immediate attention to some of the factors which made such things possible. "Effie says with some justice that I am a great conservative in France, because there everybody is radical, and a great radical in Austria, because there everybody is conservative," he told his father. "I suppose that is one reason why I am so fond of fish (as creatures, I mean, not as eating), that they always swim with their heads against the stream. I find it for me the healthiest position."<sup>1</sup> But although there was undoubtedly an element of belligerence in many of Ruskin's opinions, it was his own unfettered mind that made him form views which differed in some respect from every prevailing school of thought. And if the two letters to *The Times* which he drafted during the following months, on questions now both very much in the air, owe something to Carlyle's *Latter Day Pamphlets*, the main formulation of the ideas expressed is entirely his own. The subjects he approached were taxation and franchise, and he was equally precise in his suggestions in each matter. Indirect taxation and, in particular, the bread tax, he considered should be abolished. "The entire system of import and export duties appears to me one of the most amazing and exquisite absurdities which mankind have ever invented or suffered from. I can understand a child's refusing to take medicine unless it is given him in sweetmeat; but I cannot understand a man's refusing to pay necessary taxes unless they are laid upon him in the form of custom-house dues. . . ." Instead, he advised a heavy luxury tax upon "the sale or the possession of all articles which tend to enervate the moral strength of the people, or to minister to its indolent pleasure"; and

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.11.1851: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxix.

that the "revenue of the country should be boldly and permanently provided for by both an income and property tax".<sup>1</sup> The income tax he suggested was ten per cent. on all fortunes exceeding £1,000 a year, diminishing in scale so that a man whose income was between £900 and £1,000 a year should pay nine per cent.; between £800 and £900 eight per cent., and so on, any figure below £100 remaining untaxed. The property tax, which would virtually be a super tax, would therefore not act as a tax upon economy, and so handicap, in its early stages, enterprise and thrift.

With regard to election, Ruskin pointed out that, while universal suffrage was desirable, the essential inequality of man made it unreasonable that the vote of a penniless young fool (for example) should carry the same weight as that of a mature man of wealth and intelligence: and he therefore suggested that the voting power of each individual should be assessed separately, in accordance with his age, wealth, position and education.

These letters, addressed to *The Times*, Ruskin enclosed to his father, begging him to forward them if he thought fit, but otherwise to consider them as being written to himself. A week later he wrote again, saying that he hoped that he *would* send them, and *The Times* print them, not because he considered that they would do good at the present time, but because he would like to be able to refer to them in future, and, in twenty years' time, say, "I told you so, and now you are beginning to find it out."<sup>2</sup> But John James, that staunch old Tory, was far from sympathetic to these subversive views, and told his son frankly that while he considered all attacks on his books to be only "as the waves beating on Eddystone Lighthouse", his politics were simply "Slum Buildings liable to be knocked down".<sup>3</sup> Ruskin showed himself to be, for the first time, surprisingly amenable to his father's views. He had recently come upon the draft of his letter to *The Times* on the Pre-Raphaelites, which he had rewritten at his father's suggestion, and declared that "he was amazed to find how *ill* it now read to himself, and how right his father had been not to let it go, so that he was quite ready to trust in his disapproval of the others to *The Times*. . . ." "It is rather painful to me, however, to find how unequal I am at times and how little I can judge of what I write, as I write it."<sup>4</sup> But there came a time when Ruskin could submit no longer to this parental censorship no matter how much he doubted his own powers.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 12, pp. 593 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 14.3.1852: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxxii.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 30.3.1852: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 26.4.1852: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxxv.

It was during the winter of 1852 that Ruskin seems to have partially resolved some of the doubts which had first beset him in the months of despondency and gloom preceding his marriage. To his father, who had evidently recently confided to him some of his own doubts, he wrote towards the end of January: "When I said that I could not answer hurriedly to your letter respecting religious despondency, I was almost doubtful if I ought, in my own state of mind, to speak farther on the subject at all. But as I believe that you may at some future time fall again into the same state, and that you may at present sometimes suffer in various ways from a conscientious reserve, fearing to speak out lest you should do me harm, it is just as well you should know there is no danger of doing this, and, therefore, in what state my own mind is with regard to religion.

"I have never had much difficulty in accepting any Scriptural statement, in consequence of those *abstract* reasonings which seem always to have disturbed you. That the doctrine of the Trinity is incomprehensible, or the scheme of the Redemption marvellous, never seemed to me any objection against one or the other. I cannot understand what sort of unity there is between my fingers that move this pen, and the brain that moves *them*; so it is no trouble to me that I cannot understand the Trinity; and for the scheme of Redemption, I feel that I cannot reason respecting that unless I had the power of understanding God's nature and all His plans. I am perfectly willing to take both on trust. . . .

"But on the other hand, while I am ready to receive any amount of mystery in *What* is revealed, I don't at all like mystery in the *manner* of revealing it. The *doctrine* is God's affair. But the revelation is *mine*, and it seems to me that from a God of Light and Truth, His creatures have a right to expect plain and clear revelation touching all that concerns their immortal interests. And this is the great question with me—whether indeed the Revelation *be* clear, and Men are blind, according to that 'He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts'; or whether there be not also some strange darkness in the manner of Revelation itself."

And after a long examination of the question, he concludes: "Is it not rather apparent that God's purpose is to leave every man dependent upon his own conduct and choice for the discovery of truth, shutting it up in greater mystery as men depart from His ways, and revealing it more and more to each man's conscience as they obey Him—and would not this purpose have been utterly defeated by a Revelation which was intellectually and externally satisfactory?"<sup>1</sup>

It seemed to him, moreover, very soon, that this possibility had been reinforced by proof, for the following Good Friday, after lying

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 24.1.1852: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 126-9.

awake in anxiety over a slight relaxation of the throat which he remembered had always accompanied the beginnings of former attacks of serious illness, he wrote next morning to his father of how his worst doubts and fears had been overcome. "I began thinking over my past life, and what fruit I had had of the joy of it, which had passed away, and of the hard work of it; and I felt nothing but discomfort in looking back; for I saw I had always been working for *myself* in one way or another. Either for myself, in doing things that I enjoyed . . . or for my own aggrandisement and satisfaction of ambition; or else to gratify my affections in pleasing you and my mother, but that I had never really done anything for God's service. Then I thought of my investigations of the Bible and found no comfort in that either, for there seemed to me nothing but darkness and doubt in it; and as I was thinking of these things the illness increased upon me, and my chest got sore, and I began coughing just as I did at Salisbury, and I thought I was going to have another violent attack at once, and that all my work at Venice must be given up. This was about two o'clock in the morning. So I considered that I had now neither pleasure in looking to my past life, nor any hope, such as would be any comfort to me on a sick bed, of a future one. And I made up my mind that this would never do. So after thinking a little more about it, I resolved that at any rate I would act as if the Bible *were* true: that if it were not, at all events I should be no worse off than I was before; that I would believe in Christ and take him for my Master in whatever I did; that assuredly to disbelieve the Bible was quite as difficult as to believe it; that there were mysteries either way; and that the best mystery was that which gave me Christ for a Master. And when I did this, I fell asleep directly. When I rose in the morning the cold and cough were gone; and though I was still unwell, I felt peace and spirit in me I had never known before, at least to the same extent; and the next day I was quite well, and everything has seemed to go right with me ever since, all discouragement and difficulties vanishing even in the smallest things. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, he was explaining that but for this experience he might "very possibly have become what most of the scientific men of the present day are. They, all of them who are sensible, believe in God—in *a* God, that is—and have, I believe, most of them very honourable notions of their duty to God and to man. But not finding the Bible arranged in a scientific manner, or capable of being tried by scientific tests, they give that up and are fortified in their infidelity by the weaknesses and hypocrisies of so-called religious men (who either hold to what they have been taught because they have never thought about it, or pretend to believe it when they do not). The higher class of thinkers, therefore, for the most part have given up the peculiarly Christian doctrines, and indeed nearly all thought of a

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 9.4.1852: *Works*, vol. 10, p. xxxviii-xxxix.

future life. They philosophise upon this life, reason about death till they look upon it as no evil: and set themselves actively to improve this world and do as much good in it as they can. This is the kind of person that I must have become, if God had not appointed me to take the *other* turning: which, having taken, I do not intend, with His help, ever to go back. For I have chosen to believe under as strong and overwhelming a sense of the difficulties of believing as it is, I think, possible ever to occur to me again. No scientific difficulty can ever be cast in my teeth greater than at this moment I feel the geological difficulty: no moral difficulty greater than that which I now feel in the case of prophecies so obscure that they may mean *anything*, like the oracles of old. But I have found that the other road will not do for me, that there is no happiness and no strength in it. I cannot understand the make of the minds that can do without a hope of the future. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

## 5

Not least of the problems confronting Ruskin during this sojourn in Venice of 1851-2 were practical plans for the future. There is no doubt that John James and Margaret Ruskin had both hoped that, even after his marriage, their son would be prepared to make his permanent home with them. Having to support a second expensive establishment was proving to be a considerable strain on John James' resources; and the house at Denmark Hill was so large for himself and his wife alone, that he even considered selling it.

Ruskin, however, had by now had so much experience of the friction that inevitably occurred between his wife and his mother when they lived together, that, happy as he would have been at this time to obey his parents' wishes, he realised that such an arrangement would be utterly impracticable. "The question respecting my plans is not a little difficult," he told his father on 27 December, 1851. "I am at present living from hand to mouth—thinking the evil and good of each day sufficient for it. But I am very sure that I ought not to live far from you and my mother: and therefore wherever it is necessary that you should be, I will henceforward live somewhere near you. Not in the same house—that would cause dispeace between Effie and my mother—if not between Effie and me. Not next door, for then whenever we dined by ourselves—you and I should both be thinking—why in the world dine with a partition between us: About half a mile to three-quarters away is the proper distance. . . ." And after describing the sort of house he would like, he continued: "But even in this I am very nearly indifferent—and should not mind living in the Walworth Road—so that I could keep people out of the house—but in order to do that one must be at least three or four miles

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.4.1852: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 137-8.



in the country. I am thus indifferent because I shall be living altogether in Turner and shall consider any prosaic character of scenery—or disagreeableness of neighbourhood as so much more increase of my pleasure when I am able again to journey to the Alps: But *quiet*, and therefore, *not* London itself—and economy, veritable economy—are both *absolutely necessary*. . . .

“I do not speak of Effie in this arrangement—as it is a necessary one and therefore I can give her no choice. She will be unhappy—that is her fault—not mine—the only real regret I have, however, is on her account—as I have pride in seeing her shining as she does in society—and pain in seeing her deprived, in her youth and beauty, of that which ten years hence she cannot have—The Alps will not wrinkle—so *my* pleasure is always in store, but her cheeks will: and the loss of life from twenty-four to twenty-seven in a cottage at Norwood is not a pleasant thing for a woman of her temper. But this cannot be helped. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

The following day, in another long letter, which shows how deeply he must have considered his difficult relations with his wife, Ruskin referred to this question again. “Touching the houses—the question is especially difficult with me—because I never was so doubtful as to what my remainder of life would probably be devoted to: I always, before, had some faint idea of becoming a clergyman either abroad or at home: but after the experience I have had of the effects of my intercourse in a casual way with society for the last three years, I have given up all thoughts of it. I can do nothing right but when I am quiet and alone. But still I cannot settle my mind, because I always feel that though I am not fit to be a clergyman, it is my own fault that I am not: i.e. though I don’t love people, and am made ill by being disturbed, and am over excited in discussion and so on—I ought to love people more—and ought to like to see them—and to do them good—and I can never tell but some change might come over my religious feelings which would make what is now my poison become my food: I can see that my natural quiet disposition and highly nervous temperament and excitable circulation are exaggerated the one by selfishness—the other by pride and vanity, and if I could conquer the evil principles, the natural temper and habit of body would be much modified also. So that I have been putting off all thought about my future life until the works I have undertaken are done—but then this renders the question of taking a house still more awkward as every house I live in can only be looked upon as *lodgings*—and this is bad for Effie—uncomfortable for me—I have never the heart to arrange my room as I should like it—(and there is something for a studious person in the arrangement of his room)—because I have never thought of staying in it long, and have never cared to work in the garden, or attach myself to anything—because all was soon to

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 27.12.1851, from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

be left. And for a man who has no attachment to living things—to have none to material things—leaves him very anchorless indeed. I love certain rocks in the valley of Chamouni: but that is the only limpet feeling I have. I believe the proper thing would be for me and Effie to live at Denmark Hill as long as you stay there—while I am working on my two books only I am afraid Effie would succeed in making my mother and you both so uncomfortable—if she chose—that you could not bear it. You would both get angry, and I fear the thing is impossible. But I have not been thinking of it lately—and hardly know: I could do perfectly well—and if you and my mother could treat Effie with perfect coolness—if she was late for dinner, let her have it cold—without comment or care and if she chose to be out late at night—let her own maid sit up for her—content—so long as she did not set the house on fire—that she was either out or in, I believe all might go perfectly well. Effie could not be more uncomfortable than in the cottage at Norwood—and I should save money. You may say this would not be altogether as it should be—No—but nothing in this world, that ever I have seen, is or can be—altogether as it should be—and the more I see of it, the more I find that people commit two errors in judging of others. First, they are not careful enough to determine what *is* wrong and right: Secondly in what they believe or know to be wrong, they judge too harshly—without allowing for the weakness or temptations which they do not themselves feel. I say—first they are not careful enough to determine what *is* wrong.—This is all the world's first error—there is actually no fixed code by which they test conduct—but they endure willingly in one what they abuse violently in another: and then—when they once make up their mind that there *is* a wrong—they do not allow enough for different natures. There is indeed no question but that Effie is wrong—but—for want of the Fixed and understood code of right and wrong—it is impossible in the present state of her conscience—to convince her of it—her duty is not determinable by an established law—and probably the world is nearly equally divided in its opinion respecting us—one half of it blaming *me* for neglecting *her*—the other half blaming *her* for neglecting *you*. Then in the second place, we are always too little disposed to allow for different nature and education. It may literally be as impossible for Effie to *live solitary* without injury, as for me to *go into company* without injury: I feel—because I am older, that there is wrong in my case—she does not yet feel that there is wrong in hers: I, at twenty-one was just as self-willed as she is—fretted myself nearly to death—tormented both *you* and my mother into grey hairs—yet never would allow that I was wrong—Allow for differences of education and Effie's twenty-three may well be rated as correspondent to my twenty-one: And I recollect perfectly well that no good was ever done me by any scolding, however well deserved: Scolding only does good to good people—or people in a good

state. Bad people—people in a bad state—can only be benefited by kindness—or letting alone—(unless they come to that pitch of badness that they must be punished for the sake of society—I don't mean that Red Republicans are to be won by kindness—or mended by letting alone). Therefore I am always either kind or indifferent to Effie—I never scold—simply take *my own* way and let her have hers—love her, as it is easy to do—and never vex myself—If she did anything definitely wrong—gambled—or spent money—or lost her character—it would be another affair—but as she is very good and prudent in her general conduct—the only way is to let her do as she likes—so long as she does not interfere with *me*: and that, she has long ago learned, won't do—So that—really, I believe the question of whether we could live with you at Denmark Hill or not, is much more for your consideration than mine—if my mother could let things go on without troubling her head about them—and above all, without bringing Miss Edgeworth's principles to bear on Effie's ways of life—and could be content as long as she saw me happy and busy—all might be as well as it *can* be in any other way—Effie will mope wherever we are as long as we are quiet—but mope she must: I told her fairly what sort of a person I was before I married her—and she must do as well as she can with her bargain.

"If however you have no more pleasure in your morning garden walk, and really are tired of the worry of Denmark Hill—you can always be on the look out for such a house as you would like—and a cottage to let for two years for us: anywhere near London. But I should be sorry to feel that my expensive habits had driven you out of a place where you were comfortable."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to see how the incompatibilities of two such attitudes to life could have been reconciled, or how, otherwise, devoted to his work as he was, and wholly dependent upon his father for money, Ruskin could have considered the question. For Effie to be happy, she needed to be the wife of a rich and a sociable man; and he was neither, and could not change himself, even had he wished, to suit her tastes. Evidently he was determined as far as possible to avoid all unnecessary social contacts, which merely wasted his time, dissipated his energies, and ruined his health; for in subsequent letters he declared his intention of putting an end, save for a few chosen friends, to all visits from London; and insisted that, whatever house his father decided to take for them, there should be a comfortable room for him to escape to when people called whom Effie wished to see, but he did not.

A further light is thrown upon the difficulties in the way of leading the happy family-life *à quatre* which John James so pathetically desired, by a letter referring to the possibility of another Swiss tour, or of old Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin meeting them in Switzerland on their way home from Italy. "I am rather puzzled about coming home

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 28.12.1851, from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

before Switzerland," Ruskin told his father, on 17 January. "I don't think Effie will stay in Scotland this time—she did not find it so pleasant before—and besides people made so many impertinent remarks to her, and talked so much scandal that I don't much wonder at her not choosing to do it a second time. And the *travelling* with Effie is just what I wanted to save you by your meeting us—for she is slow and must stop to lunches and cannot rise early—and in fact would not fit in with our ways of doing things. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, a compromise was reached. John James decided to stay on at Denmark Hill, and to take and furnish for his son a small house at Herne Hill next to the one in which Ruskin had been born. The strangest part of these proceedings is that, although, despite the incompatibility of their temperaments, Ruskin tried to consider Effie's point of view as far as he could, no one seems to have considered it in the slightest necessary that she should be consulted as to the decoration or furnishing of her new home.

"I am very glad my mother is happy in the idea of our new home," Ruskin told his father on 17 March. "I have no doubt I shall be very happy there: peaceful—and in my old ways, and I have enough to do in the neighbourhood of London to employ me contentedly several years: and I trust Mama and you both will be happier than you have been for a long time—and so I do not regret the two thousand pounds' worth of furniture. As for Effie—I am rather afraid: her London Society will be out of her reach—and though we have worthy people in our neighbourhood—there is a wide difference between the society of the gentry of Camberwell—and the kind of companions she has had—more especially lately—who, however frivolous they might be—yet could hardly say anything which even in its frivolity—was not interesting—owing to its large bearings. Last Sunday we had, for instance—two generals, and a commandant of a city—side by side on our sofa—and however the time might pass in badinage—things *come out* of the badinage of such men which are not to be had out of a decent tea party in Camberwell: and after being made a pet of by Marmont—and able to run in whenever she likes in the evenings to the drawing-rooms of women of the highest rank in Austria, I don't wonder at her beginning to look a little melancholy at the idea of the seclusions of Dulwich. For me, the being near you—and near Mr. Bicknell's pictures and within a walk of a hedge and ditch, and quiet—makes the house as delightful as any house can be, not in sight of the Alps, which for some years to come—I don't care to be in sight of, as they won't spoil by keeping. But for Effie—who does not care for pictures—and dislikes quiet—and whose *beaux jours* are fast passing away, the trial is considerable. We must be as kind to her as we can."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly Ruskin seems to have left her as free as he possibly could

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 17.1.1852: original in Yale University Library.

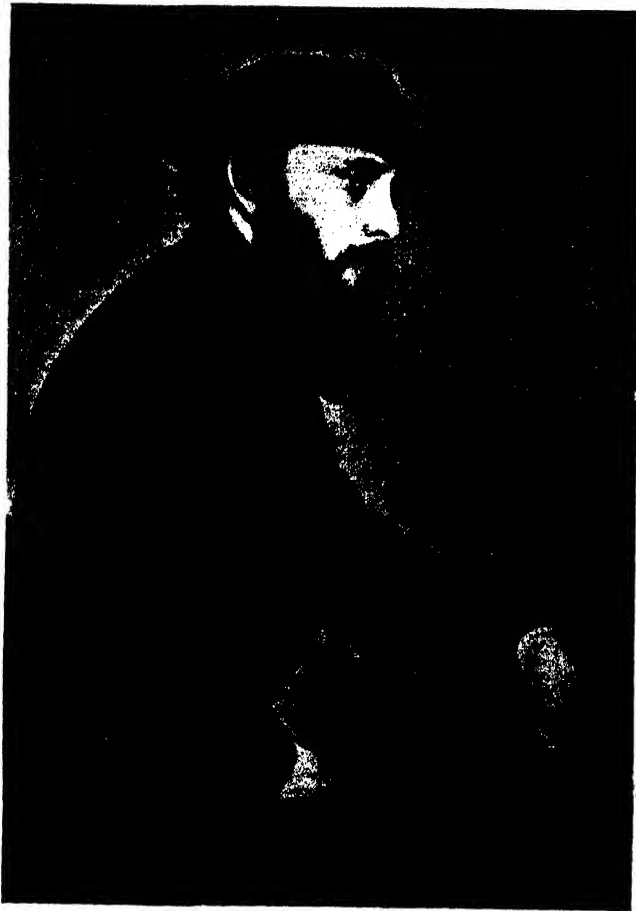
<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 17.3.1852: original in Yale University Library.

to indulge in the sort of diversions what gave her pleasure. "You say Effie and I seem happier within the last few weeks," he wrote to his father towards the end of April. "I am happier, just as in my first letter you will find I said I should be, as the effect of London Society worked off, which I was sure it would take six months to do. . . . For Effie, I believe she is in better health than she was,—but I cannot say she is quite as happy as I am. She looks forward regretfully to leaving Venice—and with considerable dislike to Herne Hill, and for the present avoids the subject as much as possible—to which I make no objection—for if she cannot or will not make herself happy there, it is no reason why she should not be happy here. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

## 6

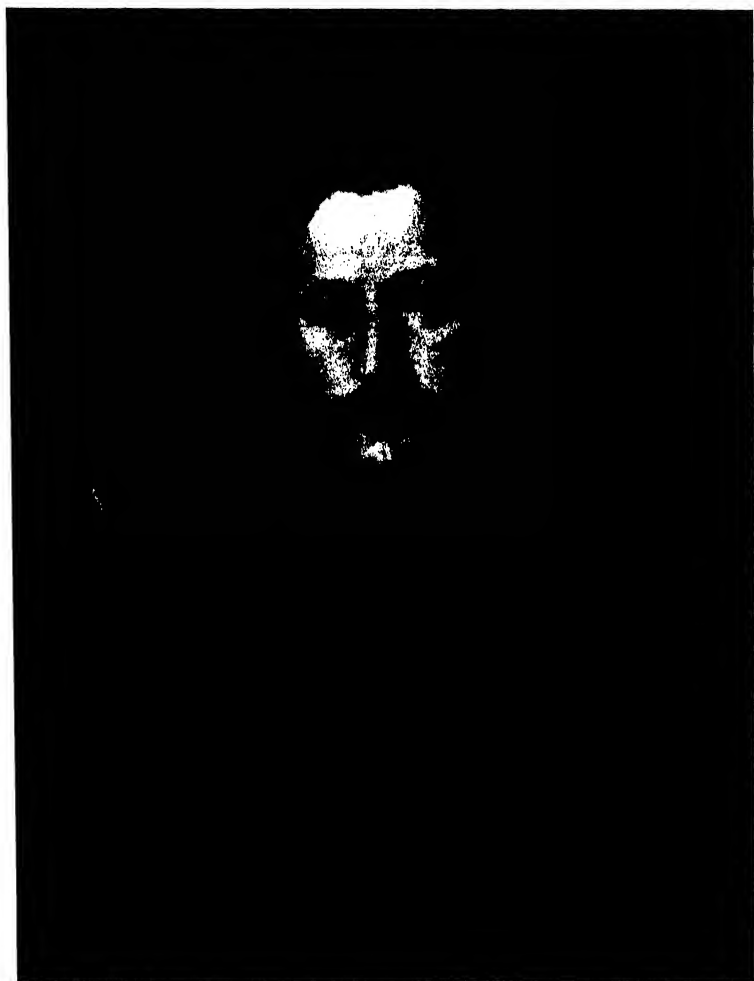
Towards the end of June, Ruskin had all but completed his Venetian labours, and wrote to Rogers to tell him that he proposed leaving Venice the following week, and hoped to be in England by the tenth of July. He was going straight to his new house at Herne Hill, as he could no longer bear the house in Park Street, where his study had overlooked a drab brick wall. Their departure had been delayed by the theft of Effie's jewels, which had given rise to considerable scandal in the English colony. Lady Eastlake, who had seen a good deal of the Ruskins at this time, her husband having been recently wooed by John James with choice flowers and prize cucumbers from the hothouses at Denmark Hill, embroidered the story with her characteristic malicious powers of invention. "The evening before they proposed to leave Venice," she wrote to John Murray, "all Mrs. Ruskin's jewels were stolen. They put the affair in the hands of the police, and suspicion fell upon a Capt. Foster, an Englishman in the Austrian Service, who had been bosom friend to Ruskin—indeed, there is no question of his guilt, tho' R. is incomprehensibly anxious that no one should think that he suspects him. However, it led to a great deal of annoyance. The police acted very properly, apparently, in their investigations, but the military *rule* there, and as it is a crime in any English individual to be robbed by an Austrian officer, the regiment insulted and threatened the R.s, who were immediately treated as the real suspects. The regiment, headed by a young *vaurien* of twenty-two years old, who bullied R. unmercifully, took the affair out of the civil courts, tried it themselves, and of course *acquitted* their comrade—a result which R. furiously rejoices to hear—but I understand that an accomplice has since been found in the shape of a not over-respectable Venetian lady, but this last information is confidential. At all events it would seem that there is a chance of the court-martial being overthrown, and I hear rumour of a *box* being on its way from Count Thun (the young *vaurien*) to Mrs. Ruskin,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of April 1852: original in Yale University Library.



XI. WILLIAM MICHAEL ROSSETTI

*From a photograph*



XII. WILLIAM MORRIS, 1880

*By G. F. Watts*

which she is afraid contains some infernal machine to blow her up, but which I hope may contain some of the stolen jewels.

"This is an outline of the story—but could I tell you all you would have no doubt that Ruskin's quondam friend is very much deserving of the galleys. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Ruskin, however, regarded the affair more soberly; and his chief concern seems to have been the pain that this new delay would cause his parents. "I do not know when I have been more puzzled as to what it would be best to do than I am now," he wrote to his father on 15 June. "On the one hand, I recollect you did not like losing jewels without some attempt to recover them—on the other, you and my mother will be thinking that you will never get out of Venice. The jewels lost are to the value of about £100: the diamond dove and emerald being the chief—and I really do not know—at this moment, whether you would say to me, you would rather lose £100 than we should stay any longer in Venice—or whether you would say that I ought not to come away and leave all this behind.

"But I believe after to-day, the chance of recovery will be exceedingly small—and unless I hear something this morning, I shall assuredly leave for Verona to-morrow at ten o'clock and get on beyond it if I can—and so push home as fast as may be. The circumstances of the robbery were curious: Effie had taken all her jewels out of her drawer at eleven o'clock in order to pack them up: and was about to do so—they lying on her dressing table *in their cases*—when a gentleman came in to bid us good-bye, with whom we have been on terms of considerable familiarity: He did so—and I went out on various business in the town—but the gentleman remained talking to Effie for twenty minutes more—until she also, having an appointment at twelve—was obliged to tell him to go away—and they went downstairs together—Effie locking up the room—and giving the key to Mary: Five minutes afterwards—they having parted at the bottom of the stairs—the 'gentleman' ? returns—tells Mary he wants to write a letter to me—is let into the room—stays there a quarter of an hour—calls Mary—gives her the letter and goes away. Mary locks up the room again—and this time gives the key to the waiter. About five minutes afterwards, I came in—the waiter took the key from its usual place and let me into the room. Mary came in—and gave me the gentleman's letter, which was to ask me to send him some razors! from England. I neither knew—nor noticed, that the jewel cases were exposed—but was very angry at the trunk not being packed up and being in a great hurry myself, went out to my study, and left the key in the door—where it remained for twenty minutes—when Effie came in and found the jewels gone and *cases left—all neatly shut*,—so that if she had not felt them light as she put them into the trunk, the thing would not have been discovered. But for this last twenty

<sup>1</sup> George Paston, *At John Murray's*, 1843-1892 (1932), pp. 110-11.



minutes, the thing might have been brought home at once—but twenty minutes open door in an hotel leaves all quite vague. It is sufficiently disagreeable that unless the jewels are found suspicion attaches in equal degree to the people of an hotel where I have been well treated and to a person with whom I have been on familiar terms. But I must certainly get away tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, in another letter, Ruskin added that he was still not without hope of regaining the jewels, and bringing the theft home to the guilty party. But even if unsuccessful, both he and Effie had gained some experience which, if not worth £100, he considered well worth the inconvenience and extra hotel bill. “In the first place Effie has got a lesson about leaving her jewels about, which she used to do very carelessly. In the second, our servants have got a lesson about opening doors to people who come back to ‘write notes’. In the third, I have seen something of Italian police system and policemen—worth seeing—though I suppose not much differing from ours. In the last place I have got a lesson upon character. For the person in question—having in his general character or appearance of character much that I liked—was continually attacking the clergy: never went to church—and in other ways showed a degree of irreligion which I have till now supposed to be compatible with an ill-taught honesty: but which I shall henceforth be apt to think as inconsistent with the character of a man of honour, as of a man of sense. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, apart from the personal inconvenience, Ruskin found the affair not without interest, and “a little like one of the adventures in *Gil Blas* which begin with a disagreeable rencontre with gentlemen of the light finger—and close with complicated embarrassments produced by the police”. “I am not in the least annoyed myself,” he assured his father—“except for you—but am much interested and a good deal amused.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless there were, as the Eastlakes reported, some vexatious complications, and on 24 June he was informing John James of his appreciation of the advice and support of Edward Cheney, “in the affair in which not only single words—but *tones* of words were of great importance . . . for, as you must instantly have seen by my account of its circumstances, it required excessive caution in order to prevent the possibility of my having *hereafter* to refuse a challenge. All danger of that, however, which (though of course I should have done it unhesitatingly) would have been not a little disagreeable in a country where respectability is measured by sword-lengths just as silk is by yard-lengths—is entirely over.”<sup>4</sup>

Though still compelled to delay, they did not recover the jewels. And at the end of the month Ruskin and his wife set off to Verona on their journey homewards.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.6.1852, from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 17.6.1852 from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 19.6.1852 from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 24.6.1852 from Venice: original in Yale University Library.

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## Chapter VI

1. *Life at Herne Hill*. 2. "*The Stones of Venice*": argument of the work: the nature of Gothic: the function of the workman. 3. Lampoons on "*The Stones of Venice*": Patmore's views: Charlotte Brontë's views: appreciation of William Morris and Edward Jones: Morris' preface to "*The Nature of Gothic*".

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I

"WE DINED at Denmark Hill last Thursday and enjoyed ourselves very much," wrote Lady Eastlake to Sir John Murray a short time after Ruskin and Effie had arrived back in England. "The old people are much kinder to their pretty daughter-in-law than they were, and look to her to keep their son from going through some Ruskin labyrinth to Rome."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, as Ruskin had foreseen, in the long hours which he felt compelled to devote to his work, Effie found the somewhat meagre diversions of Camberwell a very sad alternative to the former splendours of Venice, and the drab little suburban house a depressing abode after charming apartments in an old palace. "A most difficult house to direct anyone to," Ruskin called it when he wrote to George Richmond, "being a numberless commonplace of a house, with a gate like everybody's gate on Herne Hill—and a garden like everybody's garden on Herne Hill, consisting of a dab of chrysanthemums in the middle of a round O of yellow gravel—and chimneys and windows like everybody's chimneys and windows."<sup>2</sup>

Every morning the author walked across to his father's house, where all his beloved Turners still remained; and in his old study, which was still kept for his exclusive use, worked incessantly upon the book which had occupied all his thoughts during his long sojourn in Venice. The greater part of the substantial second and third volumes of *The Stones of Venice* were both completed by the following spring, and the very severe and monotonous routine that this demanded may be gathered from a letter which Ruskin wrote to F. T. Palgrave on 14 March, 1853. "I am getting the works of eighteen months to a conclusion, and am obliged to keep for a fortnight or three weeks my forenoon and evening unbroken, but if you like walking we could have a walk together any day after Wednesday that is fine, from four to six, my days at present being thus divided. I don't get up very early: don't breakfast till eight, nor get to my work before half-past nine.

<sup>1</sup> Paston, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Letter (undated): *Works*, vol. 36, p. 142.

I have then about four hours writing, including letters: we dine at half-past one, and from half-past two till four I draw; then I walk till six, come home to tea, and read in the evenings. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

## 2

"All London is astir, and some part of all the world. I am sitting in my quiet room hearing the birds sing, and about to enter on the true beginning of the second part of my Venetian work. May God help me to finish it—to His glory, and man's good."<sup>2</sup> Such was the elevated mood in which Ruskin had begun his present labours on the first day of May, 1851, before he had set off for Venice: and such is the elevated mood sustained throughout the whole course of the work. Nevertheless, *The Stones of Venice*, which, with *Modern Painters*, usually ranks as Ruskin's most important work, will probably be but seldom read again in its entirety, save by students of a retrospective turn of mind. Admirable memorial though it is of a world now largely lost to us, its unsparing detail and its characteristic diffuseness make the complete reading of it a task requiring a considerable effort of attention. This, no doubt, is partly due to the fact that, from his earliest years, Ruskin was never obliged to curtail his discursiveness by the exacting demands of publisher or editor. His father subsidised his books, paid huge bills for lavish production and endless proof corrections, and handsomely allowed him the benefit of all his royalties: and while this was an undoubted advantage in permitting Ruskin's talent to unfold naturally, and in sparing him the anxiety of all doubts and disappointments, it fostered and encouraged the precise weaknesses which were to make Ruskin's works slump so heavily a few years after his death. When a man's books, during his own lifetime, attain the extraordinary popularity that Ruskin's did, and then largely cease to be read soon afterwards, it is usually because their appeal was to the ephemeral interests of a particular decade. But with Ruskin, this is not so. There is comparatively little of ephemeral interest in his works; comparatively little that does not remain as significant and as essential now, as when it was first written. It is the method, and not the content, which makes Ruskin's longer works unreadable to a generation compelled to extract the greatest intellectual and spiritual nourishment it can, within the smallest compass.

Yet even in its day, *The Stones of Venice* was assimilated only very slowly by the Victorian public. To begin with, it was, even for those days, enormously expensive. The price of the first volume was two guineas: of the second, two guineas, of the third, a guinea and a half. In addition to this, the plates were sold separately in three parts of a large folio work entitled *Examples of the Architecture of Venice*, at a

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 14. 3. 1853; *Works*, vol. 10, p. xliii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. xliii.

high figure. Indeed, so slow had been the first volume in selling, that John James feared lest the succeeding volumes should fail altogether, and Ruskin had some embarrassing moments in persuading him that all his Venetian labours had not been lost.

Nevertheless, *The Stones of Venice* was probably to have more direct influence, both desirable and undesirable, upon the succeeding decades, than any other work which Ruskin wrote—architecturally, through the introduction of Venetian Gothic as a popular form of domestic architecture, and sociologically, through the principles of the right relation of the workman to art, which were later to be stated and re-stated not only by Ruskin himself, but by his affectionate disciple William Morris. "As a physician would rather hear that his patient had thrown all his medicine out of the window, than that he had sent word to the apothecary to leave out two of its three ingredients, so I would rather, for my own part, that no architect had ever condescended to adopt one of the views suggested in this book, than that any should have made the partial use of it which has mottled our manufactory chimneys with black and red brick, dignified our banks and drapers' shops with Venetian tracery, and pinched our parish churches into dark and slippery arrangements for the advertisement of cheap coloured glass and pantiles,"<sup>1</sup> Ruskin was to write years later. In the third edition of the work, he also lamented that he had "had indirect influence on nearly every cheap villa-builder between Denmark Hill and Bromley; and there was scarcely a public house near the Crystal Palace but sold its gin and bitters under pseudo-Venetian capitals copied from the Church of the Madonna of Health or of Miracles, so that one of his principal notions for leaving his present house was that it was surrounded by the accursed Frankenstein monsters of, indirectly, his own making. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Despite all this, *The Stones of Venice* remains a noble work: a work in which the most careful and detailed practical survey of the artistic elements of a golden period of architecture, is inseparably connected with all the historic, religious and sociological factors which combined to give it birth: and which, in their decadence, combined to cause its decline and fall.

Venetian Gothic satisfied, for Ruskin, all the most exacting requirements of true architecture. Not only was it pre-eminently practical, fulfilling its functions in adequate and reasonable manner, but also, in the mouldings of its stones and the symmetry of its façades, it eloquently expressed the emotions of its builders and told the history of their race. For those who could read, it spoke truth with the diction of the greatest poetry. To good construction, it added all the decorative graces of painting and sculpture, and always it accomplished its aims with the least expenditure of means. In its decoration, it reflected

<sup>1</sup> J. W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris* (1899), vol. 1, p. 38 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. 459.

honestly a spontaneous love, sculpting such hawthorn as you would try to gather forthwith but for fear of being pricked; and in all its ornamentation it fulfilled the first requirement of art, the delight in God's work of all who contributed to its effects.

Whereas degraded classic and Renaissance schools devised ornaments imitated from things made by man, the Gothic based its glories upon the unparalleled beauties of the natural world. More than this; it built with the full participation and the conscious joy of every workman employed. Pre-eminently the expression of the true life in contrast to the false, it was also a manifest expression of the individual value of every soul: the natural focus of a corporate fire to which each member contributed a vital spark, so that every touch was living, and none devoid of joy.

In a division greater even than that between Christian and Pagan, the division between him who worships God and him who worships self, in this essential division lies the difference between the splendours of Venetian Gothic and the vulgar architectural apings of the contemporary world. "They *did* honour something out of themselves; they did believe in spiritual presence judging, animating, redeeming them; they built to its honour and for its habitation; and were content to pass away in nameless multitudes, so only that the labour of their hands might fix in the sea-wilderness a throne for their guardian angel. In this was their strength, and there was indeed a Spirit walking with them on the waters, though they could not discern the form thereof, though the Master's voice came not to them, 'It is I'."<sup>1</sup>

In architecture, man can be used either as a tool, or as an individual being: but never, successfully, as both. A tool, if you force him unnaturally to be precise and measured in all his actions, to consume the whole energy of his spirit in the accomplishment of mechanised triviality; an individual only if he be allowed to use the free faculties of mind and heart. No matter that this may reveal all his roughness, dullness and incapacity—the height of his being can be tested only by his failure. For men may be beaten and chained, persecuted and murdered, and yet remain free: but to smother the soul and inhibit the intelligence, to curb the entire being in order to yoke it to the machine, this is to enslave more diabolically than with the scourges of an army. In this way the operative becomes but a machine himself, and it is this degradation which, "more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves. Their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility, is not forced from them either by the pressure of famine, or the sting of a mortified pride. These do much, and have done much in all ages; but the foundations of society were never yet shaken as they are at this day. It is not that men are ill fed,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, pp. 67-8.

but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure. It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for they feel that the kind of labour to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one which makes them less than men".<sup>1</sup> The more the great civilised invention known as the division of labour is perfected, the more each individual man is "broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail".<sup>2</sup> This is the essential failure and the final tragedy of the mechanised modern world, that each increase of convenience and luxury can be attained only by a corresponding decrease of vitality, an inevitable dehumanising of the individual man.

It can begin to be cured only when every man who wishes to help to improve the situation refuses to encourage the manufacture of unnecessary articles, in the product of which invention has no share; refuses to demand exactness of finish for its own sake: and refuses to encourage imitation or copying of any kind, unless it be for making records of great works. For the woman who buys glass beads manufactured by men doomed to sit all day chopping up glass rods with their hands vibrating with a perpetual and exquisitely timed palsy, while the beads drop beneath their vibration like hail, is engaged in a slave trade far more cruel than any traffic with Negroes: just as are those who flaunt mechanically cut jewellery for the mere sake of its value, when they might as easily adorn themselves with objects created by a master goldsmith, and thus employ the most noble intelligence that a man can use.

For when it is divorced from the natural functioning of heart and mind: then, but only then, manual labour becomes despicable; and to despise it for its own sake is an error no less fatal than to value it for its own sake. It is the modern tendency to separate the work of the intellect from the work of the hands, and to expect that a man should engage exclusively either upon the one or the other, and to be designated gentleman or labourer according to which function he employs; whereas the labourer should frequently be exercising his mind, and the thinker as frequently exercising his hands, and both should be gentlemen in the proper sense of the term. There is even no true distinction between the artist and the artisan, save that of degree. The best artist is inevitably the best artisan, while the simplest workman must needs use his heart no less than his fingers.

To expect the flawless in the work of the human hand is as stupid as it is absurd. Imperfection of some sort is to be found in every form of life, and is itself a sign of life. A demand for perfection can

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 196.

only devitalise and debase. Thus that architecture is greatest which permits of the greatest play of idiosyncrasy in the individual workman, and the tenderness and humour so frequently to be observed in even the coarsest Gothic ornament is at once its glory and its charm. "Wherever the workman is utterly enslaved, the parts of the building must of course be absolutely like each other; for the perfection of his execution can only be reached by exercising him in doing one thing, and giving him nothing else to do. The degree in which the workman is degraded may be thus known at a glance, by observing whether the several parts of the building are similar or not; and if, as in Greek work, all the capitals are alike, and all the mouldings unvaried, then the degradation is complete; if, as in Egyptian or Ninevite work, though the manner of executing certain figures is always the same, the order of design is perpetually varied, the degradation is less total; if, as in Gothic work, there is perpetual change both in design and execution: the workman must have been altogether set free. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

It is the contemporary fashion for the architect gravely to assure his client that, just as there are four rules of arithmetic, so there are five orders of architecture, and the client believes him. He also asserts that there is one proper form for Corinthian, Doric, or Ionic capitals, and again this is instantly believed. So that the architect is then free to provide any number of capitals of a requisite form, and with this mechanistic device the public must rest content, although the stereotyped precision and lack of all ingenuity cannot fail but to make themselves immediately felt to anyone with an experienced eye. To the extent that architecture is based on known rules and given models, to that extent it is a manufacture rather than an art: and it is less reasonable for a man to copy capitals or mouldings from Phidias, and call himself an architect, than to copy heads and hands from Titian, and call himself a painter.

For this reason Gothic, with its infinite richness and variety, remains the most vital and the most gracious architecture that we know. The Gothic spirit breaking through all former rules and laws when it found them in existence, gloried in the infringement of all servile principles, and invented a series of forms that were not only new but capable of endless variety: of arch and shaft, of tracery and carving. Thus their architecture reached the highest form of art, and ennobled every labourer to the level of the artist.

"The whole function of the artist in the world is to be a seeing and feeling creature; to be an instrument of such tenderness and sensitiveness, that no shadow, no hue, no line, no instantaneous and evanescent expression of the visible things around him, nor any of the emotions which they are capable of conveying to the spirit which has been given him, shall either be left unrecorded, or fade from the book of record." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 11, p. 49.

Gothic, for Ruskin, is, the perfect expression of man's true life; the spontaneous, conscious life of childhood, before knowledge and habit have darkened the simplicity and serenity that are the concomitants of essential being. All men "look back to the days of childhood as of greatest happiness, because those were the days of greatest wonder, greatest simplicity, and most vigorous imagination. And the whole difference between a man of genius and other men . . . is that the first remains in great part a child, seeing with the large eyes of children, in perpetual wonder, not conscious of much knowledge,—conscious, rather, of infinite ignorance, and yet infinite power; a fountain of eternal admiration, delight, and creative force within him, meeting the ocean of visible and governable things around him."<sup>1</sup> It is great and good and true, because it is distinctively the work of *manhood* in its entire and highest sense;—not the work of limbs and fingers, but of the soul, aided, according to her necessities, by the inferior powers; and therefore distinguished in essence from all products of those inferior powers unhelped by the soul. "It involves the entire immortal creature, proceeding from a quick, perceptive, and eager heart, perfected by the intellect, and consummated by the hands, under the direct guidance of these higher powers."

And just as Gothic is the work of the whole man, so it addresses itself to the whole man. That in which the perfect being speaks must have the perfect being to listen. Having satisfied all the functions of the men who built, so, in the perfect communion which can be achieved alone by art, does it satisfy all the functions of him who beholds it, bringing him face to face and heart to heart in an awakening in which no time can sever soul from soul.

## 3

The second volume of *The Stones of Venice* was published in the spring of 1853, and the final volume the following autumn. In professional circles the three volumes created something of a stir. The architectural profession were, as a body, even more severely affronted than they had been with the *Seven Lamps*; and one of their number retorted with a pamphlet ornamented with ironic verse.

"O Ruskin! most ruthless, can ought e'er be ruder  
Than your scurvy remarks on our old English Tudor . . .  
Your style is so soaring,—and some it makes sore—  
That plain folks can't make out your strange mystical lore . . .  
Of eloquence, you, John, no doubt are the model,  
Wherefore more is the pity you deal so in twaddle."<sup>2</sup>

Charles Kingsley, later, who considered that he owed Ruskin a

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Something on Ruskinism*, by an Architect (1851), quoted *Works*, vol. 9, p. xliii.



grudge on account of some remark made by him in *The Invitation—To Tom Hughes*, went one better.

“Leave to Robert Browning  
Beggars, fleas and vines;  
Leave to mournful Ruskin  
Popish Apennines,  
Dirty stones of Venice,  
And his Gas-lamps Seven—  
We’ve the stones of Snowdon  
And the lamps of heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

After reading some of the reviews upon the first volume, Ruskin had written to his father: “Don’t send me any more critiques. I did not use to be sensitive to criticism. I used to be very angry when I was taxed with being so. But I am so now—partly from being nervous, partly because my works cost me more labour.”<sup>2</sup>

With time, however, the book found its own circle of appreciative readers. Patmore, after having written one review which, owing to some editorial interpolations, had aroused Ruskin’s ire, published a second one in the *British Quarterly* which earned his warm approval. “Best thanks for your most kind review,” he wrote in gratitude—“rather too much influence of friendship in it, I fear, but I think it will do *you* credit also—in several ways: the summary you have given of the historical views in the first chapter is magnificent, I should like to substitute it in the book itself.”<sup>3</sup>

But Patmore’s eulogies had been quite genuine. “Mr. Ruskin has a new book out,” he had written to Allingham on 28 April, 1851. “The Architects are mad against it, but it is full of good stuff.”<sup>4</sup>

The *Daily News* declared, after reading Volume II, that “Mr. Ruskin is the first really popular writer we have ever had upon architecture; and, paradoxical as this may seem, it is because he is almost the first truly profound writer we have ever had on this subject”:<sup>5</sup> while *The Times* devoted three reviews to Volumes II and III, one of them “by a man who has really read the book and thought over it”, Ruskin wrote to his father. “Incomparably the best critique I ever had.”<sup>6</sup>

Amongst early admirers of the work was Charlotte Brontë. “*The Stones of Venice* seem nobly laid and chiselled,” she wrote to a friend. “How grandly the quarry of vast marbles is disclosed! Mr. Ruskin seems to me one of the few genuine writers, as distinguished from book-makers, of this age. His earnestness even amuses me in certain passages; for I cannot help laughing to think how utilitarians will fume

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. lv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 27.2.1852: *Works*, vol. 9, p. xlii.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Coventry Patmore*, vol. 2, p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Issue of 1.8.1853.

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. xlvii.

and fret over his deep, serious (and, as *they* will think), fanatical reverence for Art. That pure and severe mind you ascribed to him speaks in every line. He writes like a consecrated priest of the abstract and the ideal.”<sup>1</sup>

The grave young Frederick Robertson also wrote to a friend on 14 March, 1857: “Thank you most gratefully for *The Stones of Venice*. There are no writings which, at the present moment, offer such interest to me as Ruskin’s. They give a truth to repose on which is real, whatever else is unreal; and as a relief from the *dim* religious light of theology, in which one seems to make out the outline of a truth and the next moment lose it in hopeless mystery and shadows, they are very precious—more precious than even works which treat of scientific truth, such as chemistry, for *they* do not feed the heart, and that is the thing that aches and craves in us just now to a degree that makes the resentment against such people as Miss Martineau on one side, and the evangelicals on the other, almost *savage*.”<sup>2</sup>

But just as *Modern Painters* had spoken most eloquently of all to the young Holman Hunt, so now *The Stones of Venice* appealed most deeply to the two Oxford undergraduates, Edward Jones and William Morris; the former of whom was, later, to love Ruskin as Chekhov loved Tolstoy; the latter of whom was to practise in his own life so many of the principles that Ruskin preached. In Morris’s rooms at Oxford, the young poet would declaim his chosen passages in rich and sonorous tones of appreciation to an enthusiastic circle of friends; while Jones, now just twenty, wrote early in 1853 to Cormell Price: “Ruskin has published the second ed. of his *Stones of Venice*, entitled *Sea Stories*. His style is more wonderful than ever; the most persuasive oratory we ever read. His acme is to come. There never was such mind and soul so fused through language yet. It has the brilliancy of Jeffrey, the elegance of Macaulay, the diction of Shakespeare had he written in prose, and the fire of—Ruskin—we can find no other.”<sup>3</sup>

Presently he wrote indignantly to Harry MacDonald, his future brother-in-law: “The vulgar criticisms poured on Ruskin’s last work from all the presses are abominable. No one half understands him yet, he leaves them all behind in his star-flights, grovelling on the earth—and then they complain when he is past the cloud regions that they cannot see him or that he is obscure. By his eloquence, the vehicle wherein he travels, they are all spell-bound, as who would not be, for surely man never wrote like him yet—but though they appreciate the form more or less, they cannot reach the matter.”<sup>4</sup>

Most perceptive, most significant, and most important of all were the words written years later, in 1892, by William Morris in the

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. of 1889, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> Brooke, *Life of F. W. Robertson* (1874), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> G. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones* 1904), vol. 1, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

splendid edition of *The Nature of Gothic* which the young Sydney Cockerell had suggested he should publish at the Kelmscott Press. "To my mind, and I believe to some others, it is one of the most important things written by the author, and in future days will be considered as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century. To some of us, when we first read it, now many years ago, it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel. And in spite of all the disappointments of forty years, and although some of us, John Ruskin amongst others, have since learned what the equipment for that journey must be, and how many things must be changed, before we are equipped, yet we can still see no other way out of the folly and degradation of civilisation. For the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us, is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us to-day, there have been times when he did rejoice in it, and lastly, that unless man's work once again becomes a pleasure to him, the token of which change will be that beauty is once again a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labour, all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain. So that the result of the thousands of years of man's effort on the earth must be general unhappiness and universal degradation; the conscious burden of which will grow in proportion to the growth of man's intelligence, knowledge, and power over material nature."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 10, p. 460.

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## Chapter VII

1. Visit with friends to Lady Trevelyan: characters of Sir Walter Trevelyan and his wife: Millais' excitement: arrival at Glenfinlas: Millais proposes to paint Ruskin and Effie: country diversions: Acland's visit: Millais teaches Effie to paint: Ruskin prepares his "Edinburgh Lectures": Effie's difficulties in her married life: Millais' sympathy for her. 2. Parental objections to Ruskin's lectures: portrait of the lecturer. 3. John James' impatience at his son's prolonged absence: the impossibility of changing oneself: resolutions for future self-denial: proposed tour in Switzerland: return to Herne Hill. 4. Effie and Millais: gossip in the studios: friction between Effie and Mrs. Ruskin: hysterical scenes: Effie leaves her husband and returns home. 5. Public scandal: Millais' indignation: Lady Eastlake's calumnies: Ruskin's attitude: the marriage is annulled: Ruskin's letter to Furnivall. 6. Effie marries Millais.

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I

WITH the coming of summer, for the benefit of his wife, who had chafed restlessly at Herne Hill since their return from Venice, Ruskin took a house for a few weeks in Charles Street, Grosvenor Square. "I shall be delighted to see you and your lady friends, and their impedimenta in the shape of husbands, either on Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday, between two and five o'clock," he wrote to Furnivall on 12 May. "I am obliged to limit the hour, for I am busy till two, and we dine at five. . . . Write to, or come to tea at, above address for a month to come. I am at Denmark Hill in *day time*, generally, but my letters come better here."<sup>1</sup> But a short season of dining out soon proved once more to be as much as he could bear, and, as soon as *The Stones of Venice* had gone to the printers, he felt the need of an entire change. Lady Trevelyan had invited him for a short stay to her country house near Morpeth, and from there he decided to go on, for the rest of the summer, to Scotland, where he suggested to Hunt and Millais that they should accompany him. Millais, who had been working hard for several years, and badly needed a holiday, was delighted with the idea, and decided to take his brother with him, but Hunt, who had already made other plans, was unable to accept.

Of all the Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt was the one temperamentally most akin to Ruskin, and yet, by reason of fate, he was the one whom, until many years later, Ruskin was to know least well. With the same deep passion, the same deep purism, and the same inelasticity in their

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 12.5.1853; *Works*, vol. 36, p. 147.

natures, they both served a similar conception of art as the expression of the religious attitude to life; but though sprung from the same class, and each inheriting, to a marked degree, the traditional attitude of that class, they were nevertheless separated by Hunt's poverty and Ruskin's wealth. With all his characteristic benevolence and generosity, Ruskin seemed seldom able to realise how useless and how provoking it must have been for poor young artists who could scarcely afford the rent of their studios to be indulgently told that it would do them all the good in the world to go for a few months to Switzerland or to Italy: and Hunt was one of those who, as he told Ruskin years later, had been singularly put out by his failure to appreciate that, unlike himself, every man was not necessarily blessed with a rich and indulgent father.

Towards the end of June, Ruskin and his wife, Millais and his brother William, and Miss M'Kenzie, a friend of Mrs. Ruskin, all set off together for the North. Although Ruskin had been acquainted with Lady Trevelyan for several years—she was an ardent admirer of his works, and frequently signed her letters to him “your own dutiful and affectionate scholar”—this was the first time that he had been her guest: and on 23 June he was writing to his father: “This is the most beautiful place possible—a large old seventeenth century stone house in an old English terraced garden, beautifully kept, all the hawthorns still in full blossom: terrace opening on a sloping, wild park, down to the brook, about the half a mile fair slope; and woods on the other side, and undulating country with a peculiar *Northumberlandishness* about it—a faraway look which Millais enjoys intensely. We are all very happy, and going this afternoon over the moors to a little tarn where the seagulls come to breed.”<sup>1</sup> Of Lady Trevelyan, whose pleasantness consisted, for Ruskin, in her “wit and playfulness, together with very profound feeling”, W. B. Scott has left a vivid portrait. “Small, quick, with restless bright eye that nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth escaped; appreciative yet trenchant; satirical yet kindly; able to do whatever she took in hand, whether it was to please her father in Latin or Greek, or herself in painting and music; intensely amusing and interesting to the men she liked, understanding exactly how much she could trust them in conversation or dangerous subjects, or how far she could show them she understood and estimated them.

“Married at nineteen or less, she had lived in Rome after marriage, and travelled on mule-back in Greece with her husband, the most self-centred, unaffected, high-intentioned man I ever knew; and she became in many respects in perfect harmony with him. She was a true woman, but without vanity, and very likely without the passion of love.”<sup>2</sup>

Sir Walter Trevelyan, whom Ruskin found kind, extraordinarily

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 23.6.1853: *Works*, vol. 12, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> Minto, *Autobiographical Notes of W. B. Scott*, vol. 2, pp. 256-7.

well informed, and a model landlord; and who possessed on the top floor of his house a museum containing a valuable collection of minerals, birds, and shells where his guests could browse when the weather was wet, was, according to William Rossetti, "an elderly thin man with a very high nose, a great leader in the total abstinence and anti-tobacco movements, a recognised adept in some branches of knowledge, especially botany: he ate funguses which no one else would touch, and gave me a dish of them which I remember with a modified degree of pleasure. He had inherited a famous cellar of wines, which he bequeathed to another total abstainer of medical renown, Sir Benjamin Richardson. At his own table a decanter or so of wine was allowed to appear, of ordinary quality; he of course did not touch it, and his guests would have been in diminished favour if they had indulged in more than a very few glasses."<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the Trevelyans' guests at this time, was Dr. John Brown, the distinguished author of *Rab and his Friends*, who had been one of Ruskin's earliest admirers, and was to remain one of the most faithful of his friends; and when the weather was fine the whole party would drive over to Sir John Swinburne's house, Capheaton, to see his collection of Turners.

Ruskin, whose natural veneration for genius was one of his most engaging qualities, from now on displayed a solicitous interest in Millais that filled his correspondence. "Millais is in such a state of excitement at some bits of streams with a few pebbles and some trout in them which run over the moors here," he wrote to Acland, whom he had persuaded to join the party later in Scotland, "that I don't know what will become of him in the Highlands."<sup>2</sup>

After a few days Ruskin and his friends set out, Sir Walter Trevelyan insisting upon driving Mrs. Ruskin and Miss M'Kenzie in his dogcart as far as Melrose, where the whole party took to a carriage and pair driven by a hired postillion; whose weakness for whisky was such that after the first halt at an inn he emerged completely incapable, and William Millais was obliged to take his place. "We left Wallingford this morning at eleven o'clock," Ruskin wrote to his father on the evening of 29 June. "Millais . . . made a sketch of me for Lady Trevelyan—like me, but not pleasing, neither I nor Lady Trevelyan liked it except as a drawing: but she was very proud of it nevertheless. Then he drew Sir Walter for her, most beautifully, as lovely a portrait and as like as possible. I never saw a finer thing—she was in great raptures with this. And then he drew Effie for her—and was so pleased with the drawing that he kept it for himself and did another for her—but he does not quite satisfy us yet with Effie. I made a sketch of a hawthorn bush for her, and she really therefore has some cause to be proud of our visit. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 26.6.1853; *Works*, vol. 36, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 29.6.1853, from Jedburgh: original in Yale University Library.

At Callander, their destination, Ruskin and his wife lodged at the Manse of Brig o' Turk, a long low cottage "with a small garden sloping down to the bank in front, and part of Ben Ledi sloping up behind",<sup>1</sup> and the Millais brothers took rooms at a clean and comfortable inn nearby that magnificently called itself the New Trossachs Hotel. Despite the fact that for five weeks it rained almost incessantly, the party nevertheless managed to enjoy their *villégiature*, "playing at cottagers as rich people like to do",<sup>2</sup> as Miss Mitford remarked somewhat acidly to a friend. They went out together picturesquely wrapped in plaids, and the two Millais even sported kilts, until John got thoroughly soaked after a few hours, declared the article of attire to be most unpractical, and resumed his less ornamental trousers. At first everyone was delighted. Millais confided to Holman Hunt that the Ruskins were the *most perfect people*, always anxious and ready to sacrifice their interest on their friends' behalf. Ruskin was gentle and forbearing; and as for Mrs. Ruskin, he had scarcely words enough with which to praise her extraordinary virtue. Soon Ruskin wrote characteristically to his father: "Millais is a very interesting study, but I don't know how to manage him; his mind is so *terribly* active, so full of invention that he can hardly stay quiet a moment without sketching either ideas or reminiscences; and keeps himself awake all night with planning pictures. He cannot go on this way; I must get Acland to lecture him."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, scarcely had they arrived than Millais, who had been deeply impressed by the Castle of Doune, determined to paint Effie, as Ruskin informed John James, "at one of its windows inside—showing beyond the window the windings of the river and Stirling Castle. He is going to put *me* among some rocks, in a companion picture. . . ."<sup>4</sup> "Another pouring wet day," he reported on 4 July; "but we went out for an hour nevertheless to look for a subject and found plenty quite to Millais' mind beside the stream that runs through Glenfinlas—we are going out to-morrow, if possible, to get a glance of it in sunshine—and then he will fix—but he has nearly resolved to paint me beside the stream, and Effie at Doune Castle—two companion pictures—and he is in high spirits about them because he says they will give him no trouble and be a rest to him and yet full of interest—only he says everybody will be plaguing him to do their portrait in the same way. . . ."<sup>5</sup> A week later, as a preliminary study, he began a fine sketch of Effie with foxgloves in her hair. Soon they were making the best of the amenities of the place. Ruskin persuaded Millais and Effie to help him build a pier into Loch Achray, and the Millais (mostly unsuccessfully) fished for salmon. When they had a good catch, Ruskin sent a parcel home

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from John Ruskin to Frederick Furnivall*, ed. T. J. Wise (1897), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> A. Williams Ellis, *The Tragedy of John Ruskin* (1928), p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 24.7.1853; *Works*, vol. 12, p. xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 3.7.1853, from Brig o' Turk: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>5</sup> Unpublished letter of 4.7.1853, from Brig o' Turk: original in Yale University Library.

to Denmark Hill. "I don't like any killing sports," he told his father, "but there was great interest in seeing the fish brought up through the dark water, looking like a serpent at the end of a lance, and thrust into the shallow current among the rocks, his scales flashing through the amber water and white foam."<sup>1</sup>

Presently Acland, whose practice at Oxford had increased so extensively that it was long since he had had a moment's respite, joined the party; played battledore and shuttlecock, and engaged in the passionate evening conversations upon art, or listened to Mrs. Ruskin's disquisitions upon Scottish history, which were pleasantly tempered by Millais' youthful high spirits, and the brilliant sketches and caricatures with which he filled his notebook. Acland, who had not much cared for Millais when he had met him before, now wrote to his wife that he had both wronged and misread him. "The point is in his work, and not in his words. He is a man with powers and perceptions granted to very few; not more imagination, not more feeling, but a finer feeling and more intuitive and instantaneous imagination than other men." Indeed, he felt that Ruskin's conversation and Millais' genius had made an impression on him for life. "Ruskin I understand more than I have ever done before; truth and earnestness of purpose are his great guides, and no labour of thought or work is wearisome to him. . . . I had no idea of the intensity of his religious feeling before now. . . ."<sup>2</sup> And when he discovered that Millais "did so like this doctor, and didn't know what they would do when he was gone", he observed how Millais had instantaneously discovered that he was at once obstinate, eager, and full of fun. But Ruskin, stern taskmaster, was scornfully critical of Acland's drawing, and "knocked off his sketching" forever. "What I can try to do," he observed, in chastened mood, "is to draw something really well. I hope to be well enough to try to-morrow a bit of rock and water."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Ruskin and Millais seem to have continued mutually pleased with each other. Millais gave Ruskin innumerable little sketches, including the study of Effie with foxgloves in her hair, which Ruskin told his father must be worth "at least £50"; and Ruskin ordered some of his books to be bound specially in dark green as a present for Millais.

Presently Millais started to paint his portrait of Ruskin, who was to be standing "looking quietly downstream, upon a lovely piece of worn rock, with foaming water and weeds and moss, and a noble overhanging bank of dark crag", as Ruskin described it to his father. "He is very happy at the idea of doing it, and I think you will be proud of the picture. He is going to take the utmost possible pains with it, and says he can paint rocks and water better than anything else. I am sure the foam of the current will be something new in art."<sup>3</sup> In order

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 21.9.1853: *Works*, vol. 12, p. xxii.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Atlay, *Sir Harry Wentworth Acland* (1903), pp. 173-4.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 6.7.1853: *Works*, vol. 12, p. xxiv.



to participate, however humbly, in the production of this master piece, Acland supported the canvas, while Millais roughed out his first outlines: and Ruskin patiently held an umbrella over the artist in order that his work should not be impeded by the rain.

Soon Millais began to teach Mrs. Ruskin to draw, and confided to Holman Hunt that her progress was so extraordinary that she would soon beat Lady Waterford, and were it not for her being such an altogether charming person, he would feel that such aptitude reflected very poorly on his own powers, so long had it taken him to learn to paint. Ruskin seems to have shared all Millais' pleasure at this new development. "She has done wonderful things already," he told his father at the end of the month—"and works hard all day. She is so pleased at finding she has this power."<sup>1</sup>

Then J. F. Lewis, R.A., wrote to Ruskin suggesting that he should give a series of lectures in Edinburgh, and Ruskin began to make drawings and to reformulate his ideas. Infected by his enthusiasm, Millais soon wrote to Mr. Combe that he and Ruskin were both "pitching into architecture",<sup>2</sup> and that he felt that his real vocation was to be a master mason. All day he had been working at a window, which he hoped would be carried out very shortly in stone. In his evening hours he meant to make many designs for Church and other architecture, as he found himself quite familiar with constructions, Ruskin having given him lessons regarding foundations and the building of cathedrals, etc. This incurred no loss of time—but was rather a real relaxation from everyday painting—and it was immensely necessary that something new and good should be done in place of the old ornamentations. Was there any chance of their coming to Edinburgh in October? They must, if they could, to hear Ruskin's lectures.<sup>3</sup>

"Some variety has been created to-day by William Millais leaving us, his holiday being expired," Ruskin wrote to his father on 18 August. "Effie has been our hostess, Mrs. Stewart with her by way of chaperone, and they are all gone to Perth, which William leaves on Saturday for London, and Effie returns here with Mrs. Stewart on Monday. Everett and I are left to pursue the arts by ourselves, we shall not go to Perth till the picture here is finished. It is getting on beautifully—but terribly slowly: indeed I saw as soon as it was begun that it would take two months at least—and as for the Doune Castle we should have to wait for another month, it being a simpler subject. I thought it impossible to get away before November, and therefore acceded to the request of the Edinburgh people to give them four lectures in the first fortnight of November. . . . As the picture stands at present I think there is little chance of *its* being done till near

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 29.7.1853: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Millais*, vol. i, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 18.8.1853: original in Yale University Library.

November. Everett never having painted rock foreground before did not know how troublesome it was. I daresay he will merely take a sketch of Effie at Doune and stay behind us to finish the background. . . . But he may not be able to do it at all, as he is not very fit for work at present—he overdid it last winter, and now evidently stands in need of rest, not being able to paint above four or five hours in a day and not always that. . . .<sup>1</sup>

“There is no occasion whatever to make any advances,” he continued three days later. “I *fancy* the price of the picture will be from two hundred to two hundred and fifty, but he could not tell, himself, at present till he sees how much time it will take him: I think it best not to question him—but to let him do it as well as he possibly can. I fear the other cannot be done at present—he is taking plenty of studies of her head and can put it into the castle at any time.”<sup>2</sup>

Soon afterwards, however, Ruskin was diffidently asking John James for an advance of £50, as he had had to pay a good deal for the two Millais “which they partly don’t know of and partly forgot—and which I don’t like to ask for as Everett gives me every now and then five pounds’ worth of pen sketches—besides the oil painting of Effie with the foxgloves. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Presently Effie returned; and, superficially, it may have seemed that all went well. When it was fine, there were gatherings on the rocks, with Millais painting, Ruskin posing for him, and Effie embroidering or sketching, followed by picnic meals enlivened by Ruskin’s caustic humour and Millais’ spirited caricatures. Nevertheless, there were sometimes strange undercurrents of tension, embarrassment, and even of ill feeling.

When Ruskin sprained his knee, and was confined to the house, or, closeted in a little upstairs room, wrote out the lectures he intended to deliver at Edinburgh, Millais and Effie would go for walks together, and, beguiled into confidences by the presence of so sympathetic a companion, she would reveal to him some of the many disappointments and difficulties of her married life. “Quelle vie! let no man who values peace of soul ever dream of marrying an author!” Mrs. Carlyle once wrote to John Stirling. “That is to say if he is an honest one, who makes a conscience of doing the things he pretends to do.”<sup>4</sup>

Mrs. Carlyle, like the Countess Tolstoy, herself married to a man of exceptional rectitude and sensibility, had very good reason for appreciating the full difficulties of the situation. But when she wrote that, she was a mature woman who devotedly loved, and was devotedly loved by, a man whom she had herself insisted upon marrying. Whereas Mrs. Ruskin, still a very young woman, had soon found her-

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 18.8.1853: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 21.8.1853: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, undated (1853): original in Yale University Library.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Froude, *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1883), vol. 1, p. 66.

self married to a man whose greatest powers and highest energies were absorbed completely by his work, without even having the satisfaction of sharing with him any more than an equivocal affection. The girl who had been flattered before marriage by being escorted to museums and picture galleries by a man so enviably distinguished, soon became bored when it was apparent that such expeditions, on the grand scale, were to occupy the greater part of her life. And although Ruskin had gone into society on her account far more than he would have done otherwise, she pined for a life of greater freedom. Nor had the difficulties with the old people at Denmark Hill in any way abated. Since old Mrs. Ruskin continued to dominate her son as completely as she could, and as she was to do until the time of her death, it was inevitable that she should also still try to dominate her daughter-in-law. Benign, and even indulgent, when she could exert her quiet and formidable egotism at the expense of others, she could be ruthless in gaining her way if ever she felt her supremacy to be assailed. And Ruskin, dutiful child of his period, felt it to be quite right that his wife should be subordinated to his mother; the more so as he too, ten years older than Effie in years, and inseparably divided from her in understanding, was himself on occasion inclined to treat her as a fractious child. After his mother's perfect housekeeping, sometimes he would find Effie's less experienced management at Herne Hill an irritant to his nerves. There are stories of schoolmasterly scoldings, and lists of her faults pinned, with the housekeeping money, upon her pincushion. Like many men with a fine sense of humour, in his close personal relationships Ruskin could, upon occasion, be singularly humourless. There was also a latent streak of savagery in his usually gentle and benevolent nature, and no doubt there were occasions, as in his writing, when he said bitter things that were more deeply and more lastingly wounding than he realised. Thus the present situation was fraught with difficulties and dangers. With his extraordinary appreciation of genius, Ruskin was intensely interested in, and charmed by, Millais. He encouraged him to talk about himself, and wrote notes of his early memories in his diary. He watched him at work by the hour, encouraged him in every way he could, and sought to share with him all his own enthusiasms.

When he learnt that Millais was grieving over Hunt's projected tour to the East, he even wrote to Hunt saying that he feared that his absence might have some adverse effect upon Millais' work, and went so far as to suggest that he should change his plans.

It is doubtful whether Millais, on the other hand, ever had more than a casual liking for Ruskin which was the result of a natural expansiveness of nature. With innate shrewdness, he realised that his association with a writer rapidly becoming eminent as an authority upon art could not but be favourable to his career: and although he is said to have expressed an indifference almost contemptuous when

Hunt had spoken to him of *Modern Painters*, he now wrote to friends and patrons urging them to read *The Stones of Venice*, which he considered to be the best thing that Ruskin had written, and to come, if they could, to the forthcoming lectures he was to give at Edinburgh. That he was greatly charmed by Mrs. Ruskin from the first is unquestionable: and there must have been occasions when the lack of opportunity for private conversation became extremely irksome: occasions when the continual presence of Ruskin was as irksome to Millais as was the continual presence of Effie to Ruskin. Thus there developed a concealed struggle between Ruskin and his wife for the company and attention of their amiable and gifted friend, a struggle in which Effie began to exert herself more openly as time went by. Her sudden enthusiasm for sketching is symptomatic and significant, since, married to the future Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, she had never evinced any desire to learn to draw from the husband whose advice was already sought by some of the greatest ladies in the land. And the more she sought to monopolise Millais' attention, the more irritated Ruskin became. There were times when, setting out with Millais, he sought to leave her at home. Effie protested, Millais expostulated, and Ruskin was made to feel aware of his lack of interest in his wife. Before the end of August Millais was writing confidentially to Holman Hunt that it would be quite impossible to stay at Glenfinlas were it not for Mrs. Ruskin, who was more delightful every day. Ruskin he merely found now extremely funny, alternately writing and drawing throughout the day—and contradicting himself in the most ridiculous letter every five minutes.

There is said to have been an occasion when, out walking together, their path was interrupted by a stream. Unthinking, both Millais and Ruskin leaped it easily, while Effie stood lamenting that she could not get across it without help. Doubtless Ruskin felt this to be but another unnecessary bid for attention. "Well, you know how to find your way back," he is said to have remarked icily to his wife to Millais' intense disgust. Once manifest, the situation developed beyond the control of each. Effie complained, and Millais not only expostulated more openly, but even wrote to Hunt that it was only on account of Mrs. Ruskin that he continued to remain in Scotland at all. Indeed, such was Millais' disquiet that by the end of October he had worked himself into a fever, and evidently decided to give up Ruskin's portrait. Ruskin dolefully related the fact, extenuating it as much as he could, to the somewhat disgruntled John James: "He must paint in the figure and come back in March to finish the background—he held on as long as he could, but was really so ill when we left that I sent Crawley back yesterday with positive orders to stay with him in case he should be laid up. He has gone to Edinburgh in great disgust with everything, and I suppose will go straight up to London to try and make up for lost time there, and will have called

upon you, I suppose, before you receive this: or at all events will call soon—he may have rather a rush of business on his first arrival. He is going to set to work at present on another picture, his great one: which is to take him three or four years—and as soon as I return at Xmas is to paint my portrait into his landscape, so as to have all ready for finishing in spring. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Ruskin's decision to lecture had caused the greatest consternation at Denmark Hill. Although he was by now nearly thirty-five, his parents remonstrated and cautioned him as though he were still a youth of seventeen. Their admonitions were composed of a mixture of John James' naive snobbery and Mrs. Ruskin's nervous apprehensions. Wouldn't it lower his prestige? Was lecturing quite the thing for a gentleman? Worse still, suppose he broke down in the middle, or failed to make himself heard, or proved that he had no aptitude for public speaking? With characteristic patience Ruskin set himself to alleviate their fears. He had often delivered lectures to an audience of two or three; and since he had plenty to say, and, even if he lacked fluency, would say it in a gentlemanly way, he could not fail altogether, even were he not a conspicuous success. As for lowering himself, the Edinburgh artists had all expressed the wish to hear him, and he considered it far from being a great condescension to explain his ideas to the most intelligent people in Scotland. So, comforting them with the fact that he had worn his most fashionable, and their favourite, coat, which produced an effect because their lecturers usually appeared in frock coats and dirty boots similar to the audience's, Ruskin was presently assuring his parents of the success of his first performance.

“The door by the side of the platform opens, and a thin gentleman with light hair, a stiff white cravat, dark overcoat with velvet collar, walking, too, with a slight stoop, goes up to the desk, and, looking round with a self-possessed and somewhat formal air, proceeds to take off his great-coat, revealing, thereby, in addition to the orthodox white cravat, the most orthodox of white waistcoats,” reported the *Edinburgh Guardian* later. “Mr. Ruskin has light sand-coloured hair; his face is more red than pale; the mouth well cut, with a good deal of decision in its curve, though somewhat wanting in sustained dignity and strength; an aquiline nose; his forehead by no means broad or massive, but the brows full and well bound together; the eye we could not see in consequence of the shadows that fell upon his countenance from the lights overhead, but we are sure it must be soft and luminous, and that the poetry and the passion we looked for almost in vain in other features are concentrated here. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 28.10.1853; original in Yale University Library.

"And now for the style of the lecture, you say: what was it? Properly speaking, there were in the lectures two styles essentially distinct, and not well blended,—a speaking and a writing style; the former colloquial and spoken off-hand; the latter rhetorical and carefully read in quite a different voice,—we had almost said intoned. When speaking of the sketches on the wall, or employing local illustrations,—such as the buildings of the city,—he talked in an apt, easy, and often humorous manner; but in treating the general relations of the subject, he had recourse to the manuscript leaves on the desk, written in a totally different style, and, naturally enough, read in a very different voice. . . . Mr. Ruskin's elocution is peculiar; he has a difficulty in sounding the letter 'R'; but it is not this we now refer to, it is to the peculiar tone in the rising and falling of his voice at measured intervals, in a way scarcely ever heard except in the public lecture of the service appointed to be read in churches. These are the two things with which, perhaps, you are most surprised,—his dress and his manner of speaking,—both of which (the white waistcoat notwithstanding) are eminently clerical. You naturally expect, in one so independent, a manner free from conventional restraint, and an utterance, whatever may be the power of his voice, at least expressive of a strong individuality; and you find instead a Christ Church man of ten years' standing, who has not yet taken orders; his dress and manners derived from his college tutor, and his elocution from the chapel reader. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin delivered four lectures in Edinburgh: on architecture; on painting; on Turner, and on the Pre-Raphaelites. These were illustrated by sketches, some of them—including an extremely complicated and utterly impractical design for a stained glass window—done by Millais at Glenfinlas—and contained many of the essential ideas which he had already formulated elsewhere. Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan and other friends came to Edinburgh especially to hear him, and the audience generally numbered over a thousand. On the whole, the lectures were considered a considerable success, and Ruskin was generally lionised by the local leaders of society. Henceforward, lecturing was to be one of his most characteristic activities.

## 3

After their prolonged holiday at Glenfinlas, this further stay in Edinburgh filled John James with anxiety lest he should not see his beloved son back at Denmark Hill even for Christmas. Ruskin was forced to resort to much talk of his own ailments, including a present affection of the throat which was causing him considerable anxiety, and to remind his father of promised pleasures to come. "You must

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Guardian*, 19 November, 1853.

not get impatient for you know we are to have a nice tour in Switzerland together, and so I must really let Effie see a little of her people, as she stayed so quietly at the Trossachs . . ." he wrote on 31 October. "On the Saturday I intend going to Perth for a week or ten days and then come homewards, perhaps stopping a little at Durham or Lincoln, but certainly home, D.V., before Xmas. . . ." <sup>1</sup> "I shall go to Perth on Saturday next," he wrote again a week later, "staying there some days, till the 20th I suppose—cross over to Sir John Maxwell's near Glasgow—he has promised to introduce me to the Duke of Hamilton and get me leave to look at his wonderful collection of manuscripts, allowing a fortnight for this . . . I should be home—D.V. about 10th December. If I stay here for a month, Effie will go to Perth by herself—and we will cross over at once to the Duke of Hamilton's—say about the fifth or sixth of December, and get home by Xmas. . . ."

"It is curious how like your melancholy letter received some days ago, about our staying so long away, is to the 176th letter in Sir Charles Grandison. I wish Effie could write such an one as the 177th in answer. But I have had much to think about in studying Everett and myself, and Effie, on this journey, and reading Sir Charles Grandison afterwards, and then reading the world a little bit, and then Thackeray—for in *The Newcomes*—though more disgusting in the illustrations than usual, there are some pieces of wonderful power and, I fear, wonderful truth. The grievous thing that forces itself upon my mind from all this is the utter *unchangeableness* of people. All the morality of Richardson and Miss Edgeworth (and the longer I live, the more wisdom I think is concentrated in her writings) seems to have no effect upon persons who are not *born* Sir Charles's or Belindas. Looking back upon myself, I find no change in myself from a boy—from a child—except the natural changes wrought by age. I am exactly the same creature—in temper—in likings—in weaknesses: much wiser—knowing more and thinking more: but in character precisely the same. So is Effie. When we married, I expected to change *her*. She expected to change *me*. Neither have succeeded and both are displeased. When I came down to Scotland with Millais I expected to do great things for him. I saw he was uneducated—little able to follow out a train of thought—proud, and impatient. I thought to make him read Euclid, and bring him back a meek and methodical man. I might as well have tried to make a Highland stream read Euclid, or be methodical. He, on the other hand, thought he could make me like Pre-Raphaelitism and Mendelssohn better than Turner and Bellini. But he has given it up, now. That is a wonderful wise old proverb. One cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." <sup>2</sup>

Evidently, during these days, he was reflecting upon his private

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 31.10.1853; original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 7.11.1853; original in Yale University Library.

life with a keen intensity, for, in reply to parental exhortations to take great care of his health, he wrote on Friday, 11 November: "I hope to gain here in the same way by going into a quiet lodging and letting Effie go to Perth, so as to bring no visitors upon me. Besides, there is a great deal to be done in this world which is inconsistent with health—yet it is duty. A clergyman's health is not bettered by his visits to sick-beds, nor a doctor's by his night bell—but both must submit. Perhaps for *my health*, it might be better that I should declare at once I wanted to be a Protestant monk: separate from my wife, and go and live in that hermitage above Sion which I have always rather envied. But then I don't think my works, though I might write more of them, would do so much good as when I bear a little with the world—and see how Mr. Stirling lives at Keir—and condescend—if you will call it condescension—to talk for an hour to a thousand people who are eager to be taught by me. This Highland expedition—even if Millais should never finish his picture, is no failure. I have watched him painting, have led him to a kind of subject of which he knew nothing, and which in future he will be always painting. I have had a wonderful opportunity of studying the character of one of the most remarkable men of the age—and have arrived at conclusions which fifty years of mere *reflection* could never have opened to me—and I have no doubt whatever that the picture will be finished in due time. Millais left us for London last night."<sup>1</sup>

When he wrote to his father five days later, his reflections were even more grave. "My next birthday is the keystone of my arch of life—my thirty-fifth—and up to this time I cannot say that I have in any way 'taken up my cross' or 'denied myself'; neither have I visited the poor nor fed them, but have spent my money and time on my own pleasure or instruction. I find I cannot be easy in doing this any more, for I feel that, if I were to die at present, God might most justly say to me: 'Thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things'. I find myself always doing what I like, and that is certainly not the way to heaven. I feel no call to part with anything that I have, but am going to preach some most *severe* doctrines in my next book, and I *must* act up to them in not going on spending in works of art. . . . However, I won't make a vow that if, by chance, I should hear of some exquisite thirteenth century work being on the market, I may not consider whether I should be justified in buying it to take care of it."<sup>2</sup> And in another letter he confessed: "My love of art has been a terrible temptation to me, and I feel I have been sadly self-indulgent lately,—what with casts—*Liber Studiorum*, missals and Tintorets. I think I must cut the whole passion short off at the root, or I shall get to be a mere collector, like old Mr. Wells of Redleaf, or Sir W. Scott, or, worst of all, Beckford

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 11.11.1853; original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 16.11.1853; *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxix.



or Horace Walpole. I am sure I ought to take that text to heart, 'covetousness which is idolatry', for I do idolise my Turners and missals, and I can't conceive anybody ever being tried with a heavier temptation than I am to save every farthing I can to collect a rich shelf of thirteenth century manuscripts. There would be no stop to it, for I should always find the new ones illustrating all the rest. I believe I shall have to give up all idea of farther collection, and to rest satisfied with my treasures."<sup>1</sup>

Although in continuing to acquire such "greatest treasures of his life"<sup>2</sup> as the St. Louis' Psalter, which he bought a few months later, Ruskin practised a naive form of self-deception bordering upon the comic, he was henceforward never to be a slave even to his most cherished possessions. Indeed, whenever an occasion occurred, he gave, not only generously, but often recklessly, cutting up the most rare and valuable illuminated missals, and presenting separate pages to museums, libraries, and friends who he thought would appreciate them.

Meanwhile, he continued to linger in Edinburgh, and his parents continued to fret. "I am sure you must be wanting me back," he assured his mother early the following month, who had sent kind messages and some money as a present for Effie—"and I shall be most happy to get back—though I am not *unhappy* anywhere. As for Effie, I wish I could say she looked forward to her house with pleasure, but it is no use to think about her. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

On 10 December Ruskin arrived at Perth, whither Effie had preceded him. "I got here in the loveliest day you can conceive," he told his father—"bright cloudless frost—Glenfarg exactly what I saw it when a child, covered with icicles. I could hardly fancy but that I *was* the child again."<sup>4</sup>

From Glasgow, where he arrived just over a week later, he was tactfully consoling his parents once more with plans for their Swiss tour the following year. "I don't think there will be much difficulty in managing it so as to make you and my mother happy. Effie has a friend at one of the German (Rhine) baths—formerly Cecilia Northcote—now Mrs. Bishop, staying there alone for her health. Effie would like to go and stay with her for a month or two—we could easily cross to Cologne from Calais by our old Bruxelles line, now twelve hours journey only, and leave Effie wherever it is, and go on into Switzerland by Schaffhausen. Effie got here yesterday. Sophia comes on Wednesday. At present I am going to bring Sophia up with us, as I found the little girl useful before in allowing me to be more at Denmark Hill than I otherwise could have been. Effie says she can

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 23.10.1853: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, 26.2.1854: *Works*, vol. 12, p. lxxix.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 5.12.1853 from Edinburgh: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 10.12.1853 from Perth: original in Yale University Library.

take charge of her by herself, but it is sure to end in our having a governess of some kind—I have no objection, for a month or two—it is one of the best forms of charity if we can find a proper person, in need of a home, and Sophia is much improved,—quite another creature from what she was, and I think I shall have pleasure in having her in the house.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, his parents continued to complain at every slight alteration in his plans. “I don’t wonder at your being a little doleful at the loss of the day at Perth, as I had tantalized you as grievously by my stay in Edinburgh: and I shall be sadly late in my arrival on Saturday evening—for I find I shall offend the Duke of Hamilton and the Maxwells irrevocably, if I don’t look at the manuscripts after making so much request about them,” he wrote on 20 December. “This involves my stay at Hamilton all Friday morning . . . and the first train by which I could leave Glasgow on Friday, cutting my forenoon as short as possible, would be the five o’clock one—which if I slept at Carlisle would give us ten hours of darkness and only bring us home by ten on Saturday evening. I think it better to take Saturday’s express at ten in the morning, which gives us daylight through all the cross lines of Scotland and Lancashire, and brings us to London at half past eleven on Christmas eve. We shall just get out to Denmark Hill, D.V., to wish each other a happy Xmas. . . .

“ . . . After some meditation on the matter I determined not to stay in Glasgow, which is an *awful* place, but to go on Saturday to Durham,” he added two days later. “Starting at seven I can be at Durham at two. . . . Then leaving Durham at eight on Sunday, I am in town at eight on Monday. I cannot manage it better. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

## 4

During the early months of 1854, while Ruskin was at work preparing his Edinburgh lectures for the press (they appeared the following April), he continued to see a good deal of Millais. He visited him at his studio, to have the finishing touches put to the Glenfinlas portrait upon which the young painter had now resumed work: he persuaded him to accompany him to the British Museum to share his appreciation of the illuminated manuscripts, of which he was making a detailed study: or he met him at Deverell’s bedside, whither Millais would go to comfort his dying friend by reading to him, and Ruskin, to provide him with delicacies that by now he was too ill to eat. There were those now, however, who noticed that Millais’ manner to Ruskin was not without a touch of patronage. “Millais seems to be looked on as one of the greatest London lions,” Woolner

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of December 1853, from Glasgow: original in Yale University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 20.12.1853, from Polloc: original in Yale University Library.

wrote about this time to his father: while he himself was informed by Rossetti that "the pinions of the great Millais had grown, till now he took the great Ruskin under them, as a poor, well meaning fellow who must not quite be bullied down".

Effie, too, must have paid many solitary visits to the studio in Gower Street at this time, since she posed to Millais for the triumphant wife in *The Order of Release*, upon which he was also working; and the sketches with which he filled his notebooks had but one face—always hers. A few weeks later, when Allingham and Boyce went to call, they found Millais busy collecting together sketches for some exhibition, and noticed that they were all portraits of the beautiful Mrs. Ruskin. Here she was a ballet girl—there, a seamstress. She stood at a lattice, *Waiting for the Last Word*: she stood on a lawn in moonlight, accepting her lover: she looked up anxiously into a companion's face, murmuring, "Shall I see you to-morrow?"—the words being written in Millais' handwriting underneath.

Meanwhile, Lord James of Hereford, like many another, at one of those brilliant gatherings of Mr. Justice Telford in Russell Square, where Charlotte Brontë had for the first time met Thackeray and Dickens, and great ladies and eminent judges were invited to meet the popular literary figures of the day, noticed, and remembered years later, how struck he had been to see the handsome Millais standing in a doorway talking intimately to the lovely Mrs. Ruskin—so beautiful a pair they made.

By the end of January, there was a good deal of gossip amongst the habitués of the studios; and Munro wrote in a letter to W. B. Scott that Millais was out of the way, still love-making, "or possibly poring over his portrait of Ruskin in the Trossachs, which he reports to be his best work". Ruskin, himself, must by now have been at least dimly aware of the impending crisis, and the situation between Effie and his parents could have represented itself to him as little more than a struggle for domination over him. His parents never ceased to complain that Effie took him away from themselves; while Effie most bitterly resented the fact that every day he went to work in his old study at Denmark Hill, thus favouring his parents' house to his own. It does not seem to have occurred to her that Ruskin went to Denmark Hill to write, and that had she been married to a man in any other occupation, she would have been left to her own devices even more. She complained at being left too much alone: she complained that her husband would invite his men friends to the house, and then leave her for hours in their company unchaperoned: she complained of his lack of stability: of his ill humour, his neglect, and of his determination to have no children. Nor is it surprising if she bitterly resented it when Ruskin justified this determination by saying that her character did not make her suitable for motherhood. And yet still she would have been able to satisfy herself in her maiden state,

she assured her mother in her letters home, if only Ruskin had been more kind to her. This was obviously either deliberate, or unconscious, self-deception. Ruskin, meanwhile, who longed for peace and quiet so that he could devote himself unhindered to his work, was rendered both moody and distraught by her continual ill humour. There were times when he could no longer control the violent temper which, usually suppressed, underlay his customary gentleness and benignance; and frequently at Herne Hill, of an evening, there were distressing scenes, which culminated in Effie working herself into a state of hysteria, weeping bitterly, and being sick.

Probably, too, old Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin, who could not have been wholly unaware of the situation, and were cognisant of the current gossip, hardened in their attitude towards her: so that Effie took to complaining openly of the bitter unhappiness of her life. It was after one of these lamentations that an old friend of her family, well versed in law, told her that under the circumstances it might be possible for her to get her marriage annulled.

With a wild hope in her heart at the thought of deliverance, she set the matter before her father, who himself soon came to London to make enquiries.

Then, one day early in April (so tradition has it), when Ruskin returned from dining with his father, Effie told him that his bed had broken, and he must sleep the night at Denmark Hill. She herself felt thoroughly exhausted, and would go to Perth to spend a few weeks with her parents.

The following afternoon Ruskin accompanied her to the station. His valet, Crawley, who had come to give a hand with the luggage, and escort Mrs. Ruskin to her father's house, noticed that high words passed between them in the carriage, and that his master seemed particularly *distrait*. It seemed to him, too, that Mrs. Ruskin was taking a great deal of luggage with her for a holiday: and on the platform he was startled by hearing her tell her husband in an angry voice that she had "made her plans, and it would take a cleverer man than John Ruskin to upset them now".<sup>1</sup>

As the train drew out, Ruskin, suddenly fearful lest his wife might not have enough money, threw his purse through the open window into her lap.

Only that night, while he was dining with his parents, did he learn the truth. Then, Crawley arrived, and related how, at the first station at which the train had stopped, Mr. Gray had joined his daughter and acidly told him that his services would no longer be required.

A few days later, Mr. Gray sent Ruskin back his daughter's wedding ring, with a letter to say that he thoroughly approved of her action.

<sup>1</sup> Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti* (1932), p. 85.

For a woman to leave her husband, in 1854, was a very rare occurrence. And when the woman was particularly beautiful, and the man particularly distinguished, it was inevitable that there should be scandal. No such sensation had, in fact, occurred in the literary and social worlds of London since Lady Byron had left her husband's house nearly forty years before. As Millais told Hunt, the Ruskin scandal and the Crimean War were the principal topics of conversation.

Millais, indeed, intensely conventional as he was, probably fearing a good deal of public censure, and wishing to defend himself in advance, added to the gossip by abusing Ruskin to his friends in the most violent and indignant manner. Ruskin, he asserted, had behaved altogether shamefully; not only by not consummating the marriage, but by treating his wife with intolerable harshness and making her a martyr. That Ruskin had remained calm over the affair rendered him only the more censorious. The fact that he appeared to be undisturbed by public opinion he magnified until it almost became a crime; and that he had been seen at the Academy looking at pictures, an act almost too nefarious for comment.

The post was filled with letters on the subject. On 9 May, the loquacious Jane Welsh Carlyle wrote to her brother-in-law: "There is a great deal of talking about the Ruskins here at present. Mrs. Ruskin has been taken to Scotland by her parents; and Ruskin is gone to Switzerland with his, and the separation is understood to be permanent. There is even a rumour that *Mrs.* Ruskin is to sue for a divorce. I know nothing about it, except that I have always pitied Mrs. Ruskin, while people generally blame her,—for love of dress and company and flirtation. She was too young and pretty to be so left to her own devices as she was by her Husband, who seemed to wish nothing more of her but the credit of having a pretty, well-dressed wife."<sup>1</sup>

The ubiquitous and genial Allingham, making his way one morning across Grays Inn, met Thackeray passing in a cab, who at once put his head out of the window and questioned him about the great case. At first he seemed so hostile to Millais, that the poet tried to soften him by dwelling at length upon the painter's great kindness to the dying Deverell. Tennyson, ostensibly discussing Carlyle's translation of Dante with Stebbing, could not keep himself from reverting continually to the Ruskins. While even Lockhart wrote to the Charlotte that Ruskin had once hoped to marry: "I am not surprised, but gorry, to hear whispers of a separation between—and her virtuous. I shall have particulars whenever I met the Eastlakes—until then—mum." What Lady Eastlake said on that occasion, and what she

<sup>1</sup> W. Carlyle, *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1903), vol. 2, pp. 76-7.

continued to say, was that Ruskin had deliberately thrown his wife into Millais' arms in order to be rid of her.

Even the sage Carlyle was heard to murmur that the catastrophe was obviously inevitable, and the only suitable comment upon it—silence.

It was left for Gladstone, years later, when speaking to his daughters, to pronounce the final verdict: "Should you ever hear anyone blame Millais, or his wife, or Mr. Ruskin, remember there was no fault: there was misfortune, even tragedy: all three were perfectly blameless."<sup>1</sup> Only, as it happened, Gladstone was not in possession of all the facts.

Intensely proud and sensitive as he was, Ruskin seems to have borne his public humiliation with an extraordinary fortitude. "Many and sincere thanks for your kind note," he wrote to Dr. Furnivall a few weeks later, who had sent him a friendly letter of commiseration. "You can be of no use to me at present, except by not disturbing me, nor thinking hardly of me, yourself. You cannot contradict reports; the world must for the present have its full swing. Do not vex yourself about it, as far as you are sorry, lest such powers as I may have should be shortened. Be assured that I shall neither be subdued, nor materially changed by this matter. The worst of it for *me* has long been passed. If you should hear me spoken ill of, ask people to wait a little. If they will not wait, comfort yourself by thinking that time and tide will not wait either. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

But if he did not choose to defend himself in the suit for nullity which was presently brought against him by Euphemia Gray, or Grey—falsely called Ruskin, he must have suffered deeply on account of the harm that he knew it must do his work. "For you to adopt my principles," he wrote to J. J. Laing, a penniless, ambitious young Scotsman who had applied to him for help in all his problems, and with whom he had been in correspondence for some months—"might be prejudicial to all your prospects in life."<sup>3</sup>

But no matter what Millais said of him, Ruskin's attitude to Millais was never hostile. When he wrote from Switzerland to Rossetti, whose acquaintance he had made a few weeks before he left England, he enquired after him affectionately; and to Furnivall he wrote from Vevey on 9 June that he was "very supremely glad that Millais had made up his mind to go into Scotland and finish his work properly". "What did he say to you, and what do other people say, about his reasons for wishing *not* to go into Scotland? I have no personal reason for asking this, but I wish to know for Millais' own sake, poor fellow, and you must not fear surprising me by telling me. I know the *facts*, but I want to know the *sayings*! . . ."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary Drew, *Acton, Gladstone and Others* (1924), p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 24.4.1854: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 9.6.1854: *Letters from John Ruskin to F. J. Furnivall*, ed. T. J. Wise, p. 10.

On 15 July a decree of annulment was granted to Mrs. Ruskin, her marriage being declared "null and void from the beginning by reason of the incurable impotence of the said John Ruskin, by sentence of the Commissary Court of Surrey in the Diocese of Winchester"; and Millais reported to Holman Hunt that Ruskin's late companion, Miss Gray, was entirely free again, and quite happy at Perth. All London had been in arms about the affair, and his own name had been mixed up in the reports—but now he felt much stronger and happier; and all was well.

Mrs. Ruskin had undergone a medical examination, and had been declared, by a jury of matrons, to be "virgo intacta"; wherefore, since the suit was undefended, a formal judgment was soon pronounced in her favour. But, as will be seen later, it is extremely doubtful whether there was any truth in the verdict of the court. It is difficult to know, therefore, why the Ruskin marriage was never consummated: though solutions are extant. On the one hand, there is the tradition handed down by Mrs. George Allen, who, throughout these years, was old Mrs. Ruskin's personal maid, and is therefore likely to have known much of the Ruskins' intimate family affairs, that shortly before her marriage, Effie had told her mother that she knew it would kill her to have children, and that this had been told to Ruskin, who swore that he would never be the cause of the death of any woman. On the other hand, there is the tradition believed by Effie's descendants, that Ruskin deliberately refused to consummate the marriage, because he was determined to have no children, partly because he disliked them, but chiefly because he believed that if he had a family it would prevent him from going abroad and seriously interfere with his work. What is known definitely is, not only that Ruskin told George MacDonald, years later, that the judgment of the court was false, but that he also told George Allen, very bluntly, that he could easily have defended himself had he wished, but had he done so, he would have been saddled with his wife for life.

That Ruskin, after six years of unhappy married life, despite all the concomitant embarrassments, found the dissolution of his marriage a great relief, is clear enough from his reply of 18 August to a letter from Dr. Furnivall written to him in great concern. "I have just received your kind letter—I have a good many others to answer; I hasten only to reply to the most important part of it.

"I hardly know how much I owe to myself in this matter—and whether—even supposing I owe *everything* to myself—I am likely to gain much by a defence which could be founded only on statements of my own. As to the accusation of having thrown my late wife in Mr. Millais' way—with the view supposed by Lady Eastlake—I should as soon think of simply *demying* an accusation of murder. Let those who say I have committed murder, prove it—let those who believe I have committed it without proof, continue to believe it.



XIII. DR JOHN BROWN, 1859

*From a photograph by Caldesi, London*





XIV. JOHN RUSKIN, 1853  
*By Sir J. E. Millais, Bart., P.R.A.*

The entire history of our married life is due to you—for you are one of the *three* people who have been perfectly staunch to me. But I cannot give it you on paper in a day's hard work of writing—an hour's talk will set your mind at rest as soon as I return. I do not know at present what steps to take with reference to the public—on this I shall slowly consult with my friends. Our great difficulty is that no one will ever believe that Effie's general character in her domestic life was what it was—what it *must* have been in order to render my conduct explicable. For instance, would the kind of temper indicated in the following dialogue—which I happened to put down one day as an example of our usual intercourse—be believed in a woman who to all strangers behaved with grace and pleasantness?

"Effie is looking abstractedly out of the window.

"John: 'What are you looking at, Effie?'

"Effie: 'Nothing.'

"John: 'What are you thinking of, Effie?'

"Effie: 'A great many things.'

"John: 'Tell me some of them.'

"Effie: 'I was thinking of operas—and excitement—and (angrily) a great many things.'

"John: 'And what conclusions did you come to?'

"Effie: 'None, because *you* interrupted me.' Dialogue closed.

"This appears little—but imagine every question asked in a kind tone—every answer given with a snap—and that continuing the whole day. Imagine this behaviour in daily intercourse attended by the most obstinate opposition in serious things—and by an *utter* ingratitude for *all* that was done for her by myself—my father—and my mother—not merely ingratitude—but ingratitude coarsely and vulgarly manifested—imagine her, for instance, speaking of her husband—his father and his mother—as 'the Batch of Ruskins'—and *you* may understand—though I do not at present see how I could make the public understand—why I used no persuasion to induce my late wife to change the position which we held towards each other—no persuasion of late times would have availed—for she hated me as only those hate who have injured."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear that Ruskin did not care for the somewhat impertinent solicitude even of his most intimate friends.

As he wrote to Miss Mitford the following October: "You will perhaps not easily believe that of all my friends, *you* are the only one whose tact—whose sympathy and feeling I ought rather to say—have been unerring, during the trial I have had lately to go through. Some wrote to me asking questions which very little common sense might have told them *never* could be answered: others wrote in useless and inappropriate condolence—some in the style of Eliphaz and Zophar—

<sup>1</sup> *An Ill-Assorted Marriage: Letters from John Ruskin to F. J. Furnivall* (Clement Shorter, 1915), pp. 1 ff.

and the rest kept a terrified silence—depriving me of the pleasure I might have had in hearing from them about their own affairs. *You only* knew what to do.”<sup>1</sup>

## 6

The following June, as soon as it was legally possible, Millais was married to Miss Euphemia Gray in the drawing-room of her father's house at Bowerswell, with Holman Hunt as the only guest. When he had first proposed, Effie had refused him on the grounds that her marriage to Ruskin had been so unhappy, that she had no wish to be married again to anyone. But he had soon won her over; as everybody knew he would. There was no surprise among any of their acquaintances at this last act in what William Rossetti called “this curious and mournful tragi-comedy”. Everyone had known it to be inevitable since the Ruskin marriage was dissolved.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 3.10.1854: *Works*, vol. 12, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

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## Book IV

### The Great Italian 1854-1860

*The things to be desired for a man in a healthy state, are that he should not see dreams, but realities; that he should not destroy his life, but save it; and that he should not be rich, but content.*

*. . . The most helpful and sacred work, therefore, which can at present be done for humanity, is to teach people (chiefly by example, as all best teaching must be done) not how to "better themselves", but how to "satisfy themselves".*

RUSKIN: *Modern Painters*, Vol. 5.

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### Chapter I

1. *Joy in Switzerland: more work for "Modern Painters": projects for the future.* 2. *The disintegration of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: McCracken seeks Ruskin's advice: Ruskin's first letter to Rossetti: portrait of a young painter: Rossetti's training: his difficulties and susceptibilities: Ruskin's practical help.* 3. *Miss Siddal: her connection with the Pre-Raphaelites: her illness: Madox Brown: Ruskin subsidises Miss Siddal: suggests to Rossetti he should marry her: sends her to Oxford for her health: Acland's diagnosis.* 4. *The painter and the critic: friendship and friction: the hostility of Madox Brown.*

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I

THE Alps had waited. After five years, the lake of Geneva was just as blue; the air of Chamouni just as fresh. "How little I thought God would bring me here again just now," he recorded, "and I am here, stronger in health, higher in hope, deeper in peace than I have been for years. . . I cannot be thankful enough, nor happy enough."<sup>1</sup> Once more he gave himself unhindered to all the old delights of boyhood. He collected wild flowers; hammered at interesting pieces of rock; watched the changing clouds as they drifted in the sky; observed the infinitely varied evanescent beauties of the sunset; and made notes and sketches for his future work. The glory and the grandeur of the visible world touched him anew in his deepest being, and in contemplating its beauty, he "prayed that these happy hours and holy sights might be of more use to him than they had ever been, and

<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, 13.8.1854: *Works*, vol. 5, p. xxxiv.

might be remembered by him in hours of temptation and mortification' <sup>1</sup>

But if Ruskin knew at last that he was no poet, nor was meant to be, he also now knew without doubt the true medium for the expression of his gifts. "I don't think myself a great genius," he had told his father two years before, "but I believe I have genius, something different from mere cleverness, for I am *not* clever in the sense that millions of people are—lawyers, physicians and others. But there is the strong instinct in me, which I cannot analyse, to draw and describe things I love—not for reputation; nor for the good of others, nor for my own advantage, but a sort of instinct like that for eating or drinking."<sup>2</sup> It is this necessity, as mysterious as it is compelling, that has always distinguished and set apart true literary and artistic genius: and to this necessity Ruskin was now able to dedicate himself anew.

As the summer passed, and the wounds to his sensitive pride lost their first sting, he gradually found all his old energies and multiple enthusiasms return to him.

"I am rolling projects over and over in my head," he wrote to Lady Trevelyan in a long letter from Paris. "I want to give short lectures to about two hundred at once in turn, of the sign painters, and shop decorators, and writing masters, and upholsterers, and masons, and brickmakers, and glass-blowers, and pottery people, and young artists, and young men in general, and schoolmasters, and young ladies in general, and schoolmistresses; and I want to teach Illumination to the sign painters and the younger ladies, and to have prayer books all *written* again (only the Liturgy altered first, as I told you), and I want to explode printing, and gunpowder—the two great curses of the age. . . . And I mean to lend out *Liber Studiorum* and Albert Dürers to everybody who wants them; and to make copies of all fine thirteenth-century manuscripts, and lend *them* out—all for nothing, of course; and to have a room where anybody can go in all day and always see *nothing* in it but what is *good*, with a little printed explanatory catalogue saying *why* it is good; and I want to have a black hole, where they shall see nothing but what is bad, filled with Claudes and Sir Charles Barry's architecture, and so on; and I want to have a little Academy of my own in all the manufacturing towns, and to get the young artists—Pre-Raphaelite always—to help me; and I want to have an Academy exhibition, an opposition shop, where all the pictures shall be hung on the line—in nice little rooms decorated in a Giottesque manner—and no bad pictures let in, and none good turned out, and very few altogether—and only a certain number of people let in each day, by ticket, so as to have no elbowing. And as all this is merely by the way, while I go on with my usual work about Turner, and collect materials for a great work I mean to write on

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, 2.6.1852: E. T. Cook, *Life of Ruskin*, vol. 1, p. 263.

politics—founded on the thirteenth century—I shall have plenty to do when I get home. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

This enthusiastic discursiveness of effort and attention was to fill many of his letters during the next six years, and is typical of the mood that governed his various activities of this period. “I have written, since May, a good six hundred pages,” he told Mrs. Carlyle the following year, “had them re-written, cut up, corrected, and fairly got ready for press. . . . Also, I have prepared about thirty drawings for engravers this year, retouched the engravings (generally the worst part of the business) and etched some on steel myself. In the course of the six hundred pages I have had to make various remarks on German Metaphysics, on Poetry, Political Economy, Cookery, Music, Geology, Dress, Agriculture, Horticulture and navigation, all which subjects I have had to ‘read up’ accordingly, and this takes time. Moreover, I have had my class of workmen out sketching every week in the fields during the summer, and have been studying Spanish proverbs with my father’s partner, who came over from Spain to see the Great Exhibition. I have also designed and drawn a window for the Museum at Oxford; and have every now and then had to look over a parcel of five or six new designs for fronts and backs to the said Museum. During my above mentioned studies of horticulture I became dissatisfied with the Linnaean, Jussieuan and Everybody-elsian arrangements of plants, and have accordingly arranged a system of my own; and unbound my botanical book, and rebound it in brighter green, with all the pages through other, and backside foremost—so as to cut off the old paging numerals; and am now printing my new arrangement in a legible manner, on interleaved foolscap. . . . My studies of political economy have induced me to think also that nobody knew anything about that, and I am at present engaged in an investigation, on independent principles, of the Natures of Money, Rent and Taxes, in an abstract form, which keeps me awake all night. . . . I have also several pupils, far and near, in the art of illumination, an American young lady to direct in the study of landscape painting, and a Yorkshire young lady to direct in the purchase of Turners—and various little bye things besides.”<sup>2</sup> And at the end of 1858 he was writing with similar enthusiasm to C. E. Norton: “I rather want good wishes just now, for I am tormented by what I cannot get said, nor done. I want to get all the Titians, Tintorets, Paul Veroneses, Turners and Sir Joshuas in the world into one great fireproof Gothic gallery of marble and serpentine. I want to get them all perfectly engraved. I want to go and draw all the subjects of Turner’s nineteen thousand sketches in Switzerland and Italy, elaborated by myself. I want to get everybody a dinner who hasn’t got one. I want to macadamize some new roads to Heaven with

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 24.9.1854: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 175-6.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, undated: *Works*, vol. 5, pp. xlix-l.

broken fools' heads. I want to hang up some knaves out of the way, not that I've any dislike to them, but I think it would be wholesome for them, and for other people, and that they would make good crow's meat. . . . I want to be able to draw clouds, and to understand how they go, and I can't make them stand still. . . . Farther, I want to make the Italians industrious, the Americans quiet, the Swiss romantic, and Roman Catholics rational, and the English Parliament honest—and I can't do anything and don't understand what I was born for. . . . P.S. I want also to give lectures in all the manufacturing towns, and to write an essay on poetry, and to teach some masters of schools to draw; and I want to be perfectly quiet and undisturbed and not to think, and to draw, myself, all day long till I can draw better. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the spirit that not only completed the work of this decade, but determined the form of all his labours of the future.

Between 1854 and 1860, indeed, freed by the dissolution of his marriage from many formal and obligatory duties which had, for the last few years, restrained him from expressing himself freely, Ruskin remoulded his life into what was to prove to be its permanent form. Dinner parties with acquaintances and fashionable receptions henceforward saw him no more, and though he made many new friends during this period, they were nearly all men distinguished in art or letters with whom he had some natural affinity, or who shared in some way the interests which lay nearest to his heart.

As usual, he wrote, he lectured, he read vastly, and he drew. And in order to gather fresh material and to recuperate from his more arduous labours, he took long holidays in Italy or Switzerland. He taught at the Working Men's College, subsidised promising artists, criticised the works in the annual Royal Academy Exhibitions in his *Academy Notes*, made designs for the Oxford Museum, catalogued Turner drawings for the nation, sat upon commissions, acted as an official examiner in drawing, and published, not only the *Elements of Drawing and Perspective* and the elaborate series of essays contained in *A Joy for Ever* and *The Two Paths*, but the three final volumes of *Modern Painters*.

## 2

There were those who wrote later that it was Ruskin who was responsible for the disintegration of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. But the process of disintegration had now been taking place for many months. On January 23rd, 1853, William Rossetti had written in the diary of the society: " . . . Though both Pre-Raphaelitism and Brotherhood are as real as ever, and purpose to continue so, the P.R.B. is not, and cannot be, so much a matter of social intercourse as it used to be. The P.R.B. meeting is no longer a sacred institution—indeed is, as such, well nigh disused. . . . And the solemn code of

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 28.12.1858: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 296-7.

rules which I find attached to these sheets reads now as almost comic. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But by the autumn, even this melancholy entry proved to have been optimistic. Since Collinson, who had become a Roman Catholic, had seceded from the Brotherhood in 1850, when public ridicule had first begun to be poured upon it, because, as he said in a letter to Rossetti, he "loved and revered God's faith, and His Holy Saints; and yet could not bear any longer the self-accusation that, to gratify a little vanity, he was helping to dishonour them, and lower their merits, if not absolutely to bring their sanctity into ridicule . . .", the Brotherhood had nevertheless held together, even although Rossetti refused to exhibit any more in public. But now the amiable and handsome Deverell was dying; Woolner, impatient for wealth and unsuccessful at sculpture, had sailed for the Australian goldfields: Hunt was making ready to embark for the Holy Land; and, to crown it all, much to Rossetti's disgust, who always used to say that, were the Royal Academy to elect him at any time he would immediately put the matter in the hands of his solicitors, Millais was elected an A.R.A. The Rossetti family acknowledged the event with becoming pomp. "Now the whole Round table is dissolved,"<sup>2</sup> wrote Dante Gabriel to his sister; who, in turn, solemnised the event with an appropriate sonnet.

"The P.R.B. is in its decadence;  
For Woolner in Australia cooks his chops,  
And Hunt is yearning for the land of Cheops:  
D. G. Rossetti shuns the vulgar optic;  
While William M. Rossetti merely lops  
His B's in English disesteemed as Coptic;  
Calm Stephens in the twilight smokes his pipe,  
But long the dawning of his public day;  
And he at last the champion great Millais,  
Attaining academic opulence,  
Winds up his signature with A.R.A.  
So rivers merge in the perpetual sea,  
So luscious fruit must fall when over-ripe;  
And so the consummated P.R.B."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, until the summer of 1854, a warm friendship still existed between Rossetti, Millais and Hunt, which, between Rossetti and Millais on the one hand, and Rossetti and Hunt on the other, was soon to cool into estrangement. For Millais, who had himself made use of his own friendship with Ruskin to further his career as far as he could, now attributed Rossetti's intimacy with the critic to the basest of mercenary motives; his attitude being that, out of loyalty to himself, Rossetti ought to have forsworn the Ruskins' society alto-

<sup>1</sup> *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, ed. W. M. Rossetti, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 8.11.1853; W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters* (1895), vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.



gether: while Hunt later, after a protracted period of annoyances, could not find it in him to forgive Rossetti his continual philandering with the beautiful Annie Miller, whom for some time he had been educating with the ultimate purpose of making her his wife.

Ruskin had sought out Rossetti, whom he had first met only a few weeks before his departure for Switzerland, immediately upon his return. Their acquaintanceship had come about in this way. Francis McCracken, a Belfast shipper and collector of pictures, had, through the persuasive influence of the generous Hunt, bought in 1853 for £150 Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—the famous "white daub" which, rejected by the Academy in 1850 and shown instead at the Free Exhibition of the National Institute, seemed by then fairly upon its way to becoming a white elephant. Interested in acquiring a water-colour by the same artist, the collector had begged Rossetti to submit him some examples to look at, and finally seems to have given a tentative commission for a sketch of *Dante Drawing an Angel*. For on 12 July, 1853, Rossetti had written to his mother that McCracken was in a state of wild excitement about some subjects he had been mentioning to him, and had written him a long letter full of directions as to how he was to go to Belfast at once, and stay with him for a few days so that they could arrange everything. He had closed with an offer Rossetti had made him for a sketch, begun in London, for thirty-five guineas; the same size as those he had sold before for twelve. This he would finish as soon as possible and send to him, but he would not go near him for the present, as he thought it would be unwise. When this work was delivered, apparently undecided, and being a firm believer in "The Graduate", as he called him, McCracken asked if he might send it to Ruskin, as various collectors were already beginning to do, in order to get his advice as to whether he should take the piece. This transaction seems to have caused Ruskin a very understandable embarrassment, and when the painting arrived he wrote to the young painter with a studied diffidence:

"My dear Sir,

"When I heard of Mr. McCracken's intention to ask you to send your drawing to me, I was ashamed to allow him to do so—but permitted my shame to be conquered by the strong desire I had to be allowed to have the drawing by me for a day or two; I was quite sure that I should be able at once to write to Mr. McCracken that any work of yours was quite *above* having opinions passed upon it; and I have now only to thank you for your condescension in allowing it to be sent me on such terms—and still more—for the very great delight I have had in keeping it by me for a day or two. I think it is a thoroughly glorious work—the most perfect piece of Italy, in the accessory parts, I have ever seen in my life—nor of Italy only—but of marvellous landscape painting. I might perhaps, if we were talking about it, venture to point out one or two little things that appear to

me questionable. But I shall write an unqualified expression of admiration to McCracken. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, Ruskin visited Rossetti at his studios in Chatham Place—that picturesque, romantic habitation with its rooms built out above the river, its windows giving upon fine views of ships and water, sheds and factory towers, which always seemed to be permeated by a pervasive disagreeable smell of rotten sewage to which the owner seemed wholly impervious. Not quite twenty-six, with a handsome presence, an exuberant manner, and a deep, full baritone voice which later Hall Caine was to describe as the richest he had ever heard—a voice with “easy modulations and undertones of infinite softness and sweetness, yet capable of almost illimitable compass, having every gradation of tone at command for the recitation or reading of poetry”<sup>2</sup>—great poet and artist as he already was, Ruskin could not but have succumbed to the charm which was to captivate so many others. It is to Hunt that we are indebted for the most vivid portrait of the young Rossetti that has survived. “Imagine . . . a young man of decidedly Southern breed and aspect, about 5 ft. 7 in. in height, with long brown hair touching his shoulders, not caring to walk erect, but rolling carelessly as he slouched along, pouting with parted lips, searching with dreaming eyes; the openings large and oval; grey eyes, looking directly only when arrested by external interest, otherwise gazing listlessly about, the iris not reaching the lower lid, the ball of the eye somewhat prominent by its fullness, although not by lack of depth in the orbits; the lids above and below tawny coloured. His nose was aquiline, delicate, with a depression from the frontal sinus shaping the bridge, the nostrils full, the brow rounded and prominent, and the line of the jaw angular and marked, while still uncovered with beard. His shoulders were not square, and only just masculine in shape. His singularity of gait depended upon width of hip, which was unusual. Altogether, he was a lightly built man, with delicate hands and feet: although neither weak nor fragile in constitution, he was altogether unaffected by athletic exercise. He was careless in his dress, which was, as then not very unusual with professional men, black and of evening cut. So indifferent was he to the accepted requirements of society, that he would allow spots of mud to remain on his clothes for several days. He wore a brown overcoat, and, with his pushing stride and careless exclamations, a special scrutiny would have been needed to discern the refinement and tenderness that dwelt in the breast of the defiant youth; but anyone who approached and addressed him was struck with surprise to find all critical impressions dissipated in a moment, for the language of the painter was wealthy and polished, and he proved to be courteous,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.4.1854: Janet C. Troxell, *The Three Rossettis*, Harvard University Press, pp. 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Benson, *Rossetti*, p. 67.

gentle and winsome, generous in compliment, rich in interest in the pursuits of others, while he talked much about his own, and in every respect, as far as could be shown by outward manner, was a cultured gentleman. . . ." "There was about him in his youth a singular good breeding, enforced and cherished by all the women of the family. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Although no less talented than his Pre-Raphaelite brethren, as yet Rossetti had lacked much of their notoriety and success. Eager, petulant and erratic, he was without the capacity, shared both by Hunt and Millais, to drive himself, and could work successfully only when the spirit moved him.

Deeply attracted by Madox Brown's picture of *Wycliffe Reading his Translation of the Bible to John of Gaunt*, which had been exhibited in the Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner in the spring of 1848, he had written of it to the painter in such fulsome strains that the unsuccessful Madox Brown had thought at first the letter must be a hoax. "Since the first time I ever went to an exhibition (which was several years ago—and when I saw a picture of yours from Byron's *Giaour*) I have always listened with avidity if your name happened to be mentioned, and rushed first of all to your number in the catalogues. The *Parisana*, the study in the manner of the early masters, *Our Lady of Saturday Night*, and the glorious works you have exhibited, have successfully raised my admiration and kept me standing in the same spot for fabulous lengths of time. . . . It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if, wishing to obtain some knowledge of colour (which I have yet scarcely attempted), the hope suggests itself that you *may* probably admit pupils to profit by your invaluable assistance. If, such being the case, you would do me the honour to inform me what your terms would be for six months' instruction, I feel convinced that I should have some chance in the art. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Calling at Charlotte Street prepared to castigate fiercely the perpetrator of so vile a joke, Madox Brown—"that delightful man, cramfull of all that makes mental life sweet and pleasant", as Allingham called him—was as surprised as he was flattered to meet so enthusiastic and extraordinary a young man who genuinely desired to be taken into his studio.

Poor though he was, and unaccustomed to take pupils, he generously offered to share his knowledge with Rossetti without charging him any fee. But the practical results of his generosity were soon to prove a disappointment. Bohemian, unstable and idiosyncratic in all his ways, Rossetti caused chaos in Brown's studio: refused to accept the discipline which his master imposed upon him: scorned the groups of bottles that he was set to copy, and wandered off to try his luck with the persevering and good-natured Hunt. With not dissimilar results. For though Hunt was too busy to take him into his studio, he

<sup>1</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 1, pp. 144-5.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown* (1896), pp. 50-1.

set him a plan of work, and frequently gave him lessons at his home, without any greater success. Undisciplinable, yet innately convinced of his genius, Rossetti followed his own light, and, although largely dependent upon his devoted brother William and his affectionate and generous aunt Polidori, at the end of 1850 he took rooms with Deverell in Red Lion Square for twenty shillings a week, on the condition expressly imposed by the landlord that models were to be kept under gentlemanly restraint "as some artists sacrifice the dignity of art for the baseness of passion".

But even the splendid assumption that he was now earning his own living had little power to alter his lack of perseverance. "Rossetti has just thrown up a *third* picture, and will have nothing in the Academy," Madox Brown wrote to Lowes Dickinson on 1 March, 1851, "but he has a commission to illustrate Longfellow's poems with Hunt, which will bring him in some tin. . . . He has made some designs which are perfectly divine. I mean by that finer than anything I have ever seen, but paint he will not. He is too idle."<sup>1</sup> Even the good-natured William held aloof from him in these days, exhausted by his brother's constant peremptory demands, whenever they met, to turn out his pockets and hand over all the cash he had about him. "Got abused in the papers," Madox Brown wrote to Lowes Dickinson the following autumn. "Everyone, including Millais and Rossetti, although the latter very unjustly, seeing that he had done *nothing* to merit it."<sup>2</sup>

Although Rossetti's first oil painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, had been bought from the Free Exhibition in Hyde Park Corner in 1849 by the Marchioness of Bath, this had been due to the influence of his aunt Miss Charlotte Polidori, who had been a governess in his family for many years, and never lost an opportunity to praise or to help her gifted nephew. It was not until nearly four years later that, owing to the persuasive powers of Holman Hunt, McCracken had ventured upon the famous purchase of the "white daub". Meanwhile, Rossetti had often enough been reduced to the direst straits, and without help from his family he would have been unable to survive. On one occasion, he had even talked of "cutting" art altogether, and applied for a job as a telegraph clerk in the North Western Railway. But when he went up for interview he was so bewildered by the intricate nature of the performance that would be required of him that he announced gaily that it was more than he could ever learn.

That, despite the irony with which he referred to it, Rossetti was deeply gratified by Ruskin's letter, is indubitable. He not only wrote of it to all his friends, but he carried it about in his pocket and frequently showed it round. "McCracken, of course, sent my draw-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

ings to Ruskin, who the other day wrote me an incredible letter about it, remaining mine respectfully (!) and wanting to call. I of course stroked him down in my answer, and yesterday he came. His manner was more agreeable than I had always expected. He seems in a mood to make my fortune."<sup>1</sup> Before he was certain that Ruskin intended to be of practical use to him, however, his attitude had been almost contemptuous. "M. C. sent me a passage from a letter of Ruskin's about my Dante-esque sketches exhibited this year at the Winter Gallery," he had written to Woolner a short time before. "R. goes into raptures about colour and grouping which he says are superior to anything in modern art—which I believe is almost as absurd as certain absurd objections he makes to them. However, as he is only half informed about Art, anything he says in favour of one's work is of course sure to prove invaluable in a professional way, and I only hope, for the sake of my Rubbish, that he may have the honesty to say publicly in his new book what he has said privately, but I doubt this."<sup>2</sup>

Soon Rossetti was invited to Denmark Hill to lunch; and he and Ruskin spent the afternoon reading the *Day and Night* songs together, which Ruskin found so heavenly that his guest, as he wrote to Allingham later, gave him the book. A few days later, when he was dining there in state, Rossetti was summoned unexpectedly to his dying father's bedside. "You must have been surprised and hurt at my not having written to you before," Ruskin wrote to him with some diffidence on 2 May, 1854—"but you may perhaps already have heard, or at all events will soon hear, that I have had much upon my mind during the last week, and have been unable to attend to my daily duties—of which one of the most urgent would at another time have been that of expressing to you my sympathy with you on the occasion of your late loss.

"I should be sincerely obliged to you if you would sometimes write to me (as I shall not, I fear, be able to see you before I leave town), telling me how you are, and what you are doing and thinking of. I am truly anxious that no sorrow—still less, undue distrust of yourself—may interfere with the exercise of your very noble powers, and I shall deem it a great privilege if you would sometimes allow me to have fellowship in your thoughts and sympathy with your purposes."<sup>3</sup> But Ruskin was not content with mere expressions of sympathy. He made a present to Rossetti of all his books, and, lest he should wound his pride by so expensive a gift, suggested that if Rossetti would like to give him a little drawing in exchange, he would hold it one of his most precious possessions. He sent him a piece of opal—"not a fine piece, but I think you will sometimes have pleasure in letting your

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 179-80.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Woolner, *Thomas Woolner: His Life in Letters*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 2.5.1854: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 166-7.

eye rest upon it":<sup>1</sup> and, what was more important to Rossetti, he commissioned from him a second water-colour drawing, to be done whenever he found it convenient, of whatever subject he cared to choose. "Ruskin, I hear, has something anent me in his lectures, just published," Rossetti wrote, more respectfully now, to Madox Brown on 13 May. "He has written, as I suppose you know, to *The Times* in defence of Hunt's *Light of the World*. Millais has written to me that Gambart wants me to paint him something; so I imagine Ruskin is beginning to bear fruit. MacCrack has kindly asked me to accept £50 instead of thirty-five guineas for that water-colour."<sup>2</sup>

Although Ruskin did not see Rossetti again before he left for Switzerland, it is said that he took round to his studio for safe keeping the Millais portrait of himself, which John James, who knew perfectly well the true reason for Effie's behaviour, had threatened to run a knife through. At Geneva, Ruskin received a letter from Rossetti, full of doubts as to whether it was worth while his finishing his painting *Found*, since Hunt had recently exhibited *The Awakened Conscience*, which Rossetti considered to be but a different interpretation of the same theme (the thought that other painters were stealing his ideas was a form of mania, like his fear of criticism, that was to increase with the passing years). Having crossed out the Mr. of his address—"we will not go on Mr.—ing each other"—Ruskin replied with great fairness to the disgruntled painter: "You feel as if it were not worth while now to bring out your modern subjects, as Hunt has done his first. Now, as to the original suggestion of the power which there is in *modern life* if honestly treated, I firmly believe that, to whomsoever it in reality may belong in *priority of time*, it belongs to all three of you equally in *right of possession*. I think that you, Hunt and Millais would, every one of you, have made the discovery, without assistance or suggestion from the other. One might make it quicker or slower than another, and I suppose that, actually, you were the first who did it. But it would have been impossible for men of such eyes and hearts as Millais and Hunt to walk the streets of London, or watch the things that pass each day, and not to discover also what there was in them to be shown and painted. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Meantime, Rossetti had been lent Ruskin's recent *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*: and, much gratified to find in them "a slight though very friendly mention of himself",<sup>4</sup> decided that they were very interesting.

Nevertheless, impecunious and improvident as ever, he also found this sudden turn of the wheel was not without its embarrassments. "I am afraid you will guess, before reading this letter, what it is likely

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism* (1889), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 5.6.1854: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 167-8.

<sup>4</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 131.

to relate to," he wrote to his aunt Charlotte that August. "I am in a very great difficulty for money, and unless by your kind assistance (if you are able to afford it me) really do not know how to extricate myself from it. I have two water-colours in hand, and am beginning an oil picture. The last, and one of the former, I believe I may consider already sold (to Messrs. Ruskin and McCracken) as soon as they are finished; but meanwhile I am utterly at a loss for the means of getting models, etc., to carry them on."<sup>1</sup>

Both to his aunt, and to William Allingham, he eagerly spoke of Ruskin's generosity. "I've also read some of *The Stones of Venice*, really a splendid present, including even the huge plates of Venetian Architecture. . . . He wished me to accept these as a gift, but it is such a costly one that I have told him I shall make a small water-colour in exchange."<sup>2</sup>

No sooner was Ruskin settled again at Denmark Hill than he invited Rossetti to dine ("and not be too P.R.B. as Stanfield is coming too"),<sup>3</sup> and it was not long before Rossetti confided to him something of his relations with the beautiful and consumptive Miss Siddal, whom he was accustomed now to refer to as "his pupil".

## 3

It was now five years since Rossetti had met Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal. He had heard of her first one evening, at Hunt's studio, during the days when he would turn up with his drawing folio, to work in silence while Hunt painted in another part of the room; and very soon she had completely captured his imagination. Allingham had seen her first, quite by chance, looking through the window of the little shop in Cranbourne Alley where she worked, while she was reaching up to lift down a hatbox, her beautiful, haunting face tilted back, her dress faintly outlining the beauty of her arms and breast. And remembering that Deverell, his friend, the son of the Secretary of the Government School of Design, was still seeking a model for Viola in his picture of *Twelfth Night*, he had told him of her at their next meeting. So Deverell invited his mother to go with him to the bonnet shop, in the hope of persuading the unknown beauty to sit to him. His description of her that night when he had broken in upon Hunt and Rossetti to share his good news, was enough to kindle the imagination of any man. She was like a queen, he said, magnificently tall, with a lovely figure, a stately neck, and a face of the most delicate and finished modelling; the flow of surface from the temples over the cheek being exactly like the carving of a Pheidean goddess. Her eyes were grey, and her hair was like dazzling copper,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Violet Hunt. *The Wife of Rossetti*, p. 105.

shimmering with lustre; and already she had consented to let him paint her. Not only was she beautiful but, although of humble station, her manners were those of a lady, direct and unaffected. In short, they must come and see the marvel for themselves the following day.

Hunt was unable to accept this ingenuous invitation. He had work to do. But Rossetti, who knew no regular hours, who slept half the morning and stayed up talking half the night—Rossetti went. And that same evening he visited Hunt again with fresh tales of the new beauty, and the wonderful fact that he had prevailed upon her to sit for him also.

Thus Miss Siddal entered the circle of the young Pre-Raphaelites. Scarcely seventeen, the daughter of a poor but respectable cutter who lived on the south side of the river, who had nurtured her upon legends of departed family grandeur; burdened with an exotic beauty which already clearly betokened her incipient ill health, she now ventured, without training, influence or money, into the perilous and exacting realm of art. To Deverell she posed as Viola; to Hunt, for the figure of the fair Celt in his Druid picture: to Madox Brown for part of the face in *Christ Washing Peter's Feet*, and to Millais as Ophelia, lying uncomplaining for hours in a bath, with clothes outspread, while the water grew steadily colder until she was quite benumbed. It was not until he had known her about two years that Rossetti began to be completely fascinated by her. Remote, withdrawn, her lovely face haunted with strange visions, she watched Rossetti until gradually she seemed to lose her very individuality in his; writing forlorn, curiously poignant little lyrics imitative of those that he admired; sketching strange, stiff artificial pictures of knights in armour and women with tragic eyes, in the affected medieval style that was fast becoming characteristic of his work. For hours, as he painted, Rossetti, spellbound, would repeat her pet-name—Guggum, Guggum, Guggum. For hours she would sit silent, in the romantic, malodorous shadows of the studio at Chatham Place, wrestling, tortured by determination, with the curiously wooden sketches over which Rossetti was so enthusiastic. An enigmatic figure, lonely, courageous and oddly stubborn. Even the amiable William Rossetti never knew what anything meant to her. Every attempt at serious conversation she would pass off with a joke, withdrawing to the inner world of imagination which was her sanctuary in her prolonged and uncomplaining struggle against poverty and disease.

Her illness had become apparent about the time that Ruskin and Rossetti had first become acquainted, and immediately Rossetti had intended to interest his new friend, if possible, on her behalf. "The Howitts insisted on Lizzie's seeing a Dr. Wilkinson, a friend of theirs, and I believe an eminent man," Rossetti had written to Madox Brown at the end of March 1854. "He finds that the poor dear has



contracted a curvature of the spine, and says that she ought not to paint at present."<sup>1</sup> "Barbara Smith, the Howitts, and Dr. Wilkinson are all enraptured with the dear," he wrote again shortly afterwards. "I mean to show her productions to Ruskin, who was here again this morning, and who I know will worship her."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin, as soon as Rossetti had confided in him, was eager with plans for her relief. Not only did he wish to send her away immediately to Wales or Jersey, where she might recuperate, but he was also desperately anxious to find some practical way to help Rossetti extricate himself from the state of acute financial chaos in which he lived.

Madox Brown, "the dearest and kindest of old fellows"<sup>3</sup> as Rossetti called him, has left many vivid descriptions of Rossetti's vagaries at this period: of how he would invade his studio at Newman Street, "keeping him up talking till four a.m., painting sometimes all night, making the whole place miserable, translating sonnets at breakfast, working very hard and doing nothing".<sup>4</sup> "Called on Dante Rossetti," he recorded on 6 October, 1854. "Saw Miss Siddal, looking thinner and more death-like and more beautiful and more ragged than ever: a real artist, a woman without parallel for many a long year."<sup>5</sup> "Gabriel is gone to Ruskin for this evening," he noted on 1 November. "Tomorrow he returns. After he has talked as much as his strength will bear, he becomes spiteful and crusty, denying everything, and when chaffed he at length grows bitterly sarcastic in his way, but was never quite unpleasant, nor ever unbearable."<sup>6</sup>

Diffident, generous, self-critical, and deeply embarrassed by the many malicious rumours that he knew were being spread about him, Ruskin presently wrote at length to Rossetti a finely self-revealing letter in order to relieve him of any possible reluctance he might feel in the matter of putting himself under an obligation to anyone in carrying out the main purpose of his life. "I think it well," he said, "to tell you something about myself, and what you really ought to feel about me in this matter.

"You constantly hear a great many people saying I am very bad, and perhaps you yourself have been disposed lately to think me very good. I am neither the one nor the other. I am very self-indulgent, very proud, very obstinate, and *very* resentful; on the other side, I am very upright—nearly as just as I suppose it is possible for a man to be in this world—exceedingly fond of making people happy, and devotedly reverent to all true mental or moral power. I never betrayed a trust—never wilfully did an unkind thing—and never, in little or large matters, depreciated another that I might raise myself. I

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, p. 45.

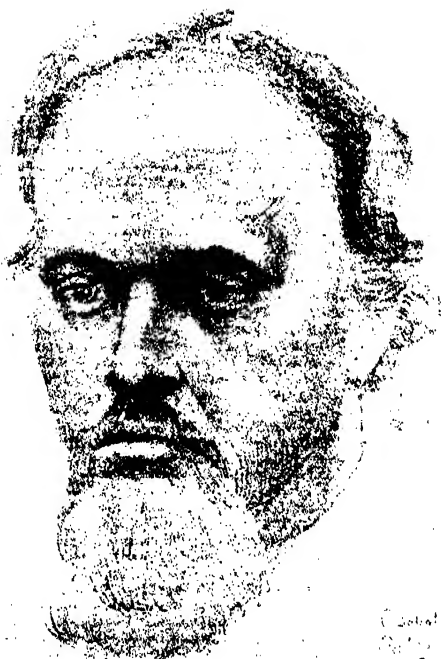
<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> W. Minto, *Autobiographical Notes of W. B. Scott*, vol. 1, p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.



XV. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

*By Cecil Schott*



XVI. ELIZABETH ELEANOR SIDDAL, LATER MRS D. G. ROSSETTI

*From a pencil drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti*



XVII. JOHN RUSKIN, 1861

*By D. G. Rossetti*



XVIII. FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE

*By Sir Samuel Lawrence*

believe I once had affections as warm as most people; but partly from evil chance, and partly from foolish misplacing of them, they have got tumbled down and broken to pieces. It is a very great, in the long run the greatest, misfortune of my life that, on the whole, my relations, cousins and so forth, are persons with whom I can have no sympathy, and that circumstances have always somehow or another kept me out of the way of the people of whom I could have made friends. So that I have no friendships and no loves.

"Now you know the best and worst of me, and you may rely upon it it is the truth. If you hear people say I am utterly hard and cold, depend upon it it is untrue. Though I have no friendships and no loves, I cannot read the epitaph of the Spartans at Thermopylae with a steady voice to the end, and there is an old glove in one of my drawers that has lain there eighteen years, which is worth something to me yet. If, on the other hand, you ever feel disposed to think me particularly good, you will be just as wrong as most people are on the other side. My pleasures are in seeing, thinking, reading and making people happy (if I can, consistently with my own comfort). And I *take* these pleasures. It seems to me that one man is made one way, and one another—the measure of effort and self-denial can never be known, except by each conscience to itself. Mine is small enough.

"But, besides taking pleasure thus where I happen to find it, I have a theory of life which it seems to me impossible as a rational being to be altogether without—namely, that we are all sent into the world to be of such use to each other as we can, and also that my particular use is likely to be in the things I know something about—that is to say, in matters connected with painting.

"Thus then it stands. It seems to me that, amongst all the painters I know, you on the whole have the greatest genius, and you appear to me also to be—as far as I can make out—a very good sort of person. I see that you are unhappy, and that you can't bring out your genius as you should. It seems to me then the proper and necessary thing, if I can, to make you more happy, and that I should be more really useful in enabling you to paint properly and keep your room in order than in any other way. . . .

"I am not going to make you any offer till you tell me, if you are willing to do so, what your wishes and circumstances really are. What I meant was to ask if an agreement to paint for me regularly, up to a certain value, would put you more at your ease; but I will not enter into more particulars at present, for I hardly know, till I have settled some business with my father, what my circumstances really are. Meantime I hope this letter will put you more at your ease, and that you will believe me always affectionately yours.

"One thing, by-the-bye, I hope you will not permit even for a moment to slide into your head. That anything I am doing for workmen, or for anybody, is in any wise an endeavour to *regain* position

in public opinion. I *am* what I always was; I am doing what I always proposed to do, and what I have been hindered by untoward circumstances from doing hitherto; and the only temptation which is brought upon me by calumny is, not to fawn for public favour, but to give up trying to do the public any good, and enjoy myself misanthropically. I forgot to say that I really do *covet* your drawings as much I as covet Turner's; only it is useless self-indulgence to buy Turner's, and useful self-indulgence to buy yours. Only I won't have them after they have been more than nine times rubbed entirely out, remember that."<sup>1</sup>

The arrangement finally agreed upon between Ruskin and Rossetti was that Ruskin guaranteed to buy all Rossetti's drawings that he liked up to a certain specified figure, every year, at prices such as Rossetti would have normally fixed: and that if he did not care for any particular work offered to him, Rossetti was of course free to sell it to anyone else. Thus Rossetti was assured of a regular income at the period when he most needed it, and Ruskin had the first refusal of all his work. But this was not all. Presently Ruskin wrote to Rossetti on the subject again, to assure him that he had made arrangements with his lawyer that, were any accident to befall him, their arrangement would still hold good, and tactfully to enquire whether Rossetti had "any plans or wishes respecting Miss S. which he was prevented from carrying out by want of a certain income, and if so, what certain income would enable him to carry them out".<sup>2</sup>

By now Ruskin had also fallen under the curious spell of that strange and enigmatic woman. He seems to have first met her the second week of March, 1855, for on the 18th of that month Rossetti wrote to William Allingham: "About a week ago, Ruskin saw, and bought on the spot every scrap of designs hitherto produced by Miss Siddal. He declared that they were far better than mine, or almost than anyone's, and he seemed quite wild with delight at getting them. He asked me to name a price for them, after asking and hearing they were for sale; and I, of course, considering the immense advantage of their getting into his hands, named a very low price, £25, which he declared to be too low even for a low price, and increased to £30. He is going to have them splendidly mounted and bound together in gold; and no doubt this will be a real opening for her, as it is already a great assistance and encouragement. . . . She is now doing the designs wanted. . . . I wrote about it to Woolner, who has been staying for a week or two with the Tennysons; and they, hearing that several of Miss Siddal's designs were from Tennyson, and being told about Ruskin, etc., wish her exceedingly to join in the illustrated edition, and Mrs. T. wrote immediately to Moxon about it, declaring that she had rather pay for Miss S.'s designs herself than not have

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 70-76.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.

them in the book."<sup>1</sup> Rossetti's enthusiasm for Miss Siddal's drawings was always unrestrained. When, in 1857, he specially invited Hunt to see the "stunning" drawings the Sid had sent to the Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition, Hunt was misguided enough to say that, had he not known it, he would have thought they were successful designs by Deverell. "Deverell!" Rossetti exclaimed contemptuously. "They are a thousand times better than anything he ever did."<sup>2</sup>

Madox Brown, informed of the good news, noted caustically on 10 March: "I had a letter from Rossetti . . . saying that Ruskin had bought all Miss Siddal's drawings, and said they beat Rossetti's own. This is like Ruskin—the incarnation of exaggeration. However, he is right to admire them. She is a stunner, and no mistake."<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Rossetti had also passed on the good news to Allingham. "Ruskin's interest in her continues unabated," he wrote on 22 March, "and he is most desirous of benefiting her in any way in his power. Some thoroughly fine day she and I are to pay him our first visit together."<sup>4</sup>

Soon after this Rossetti and Miss Siddal were invited to dine in state at Denmark Hill. "I have reason to be most thankful to Ruskin for his great kindness to her. She and I spent Wednesday there, and all the R.s were most delighted with Guggum. J. R. said she was a noble, glorious creature, and his father said that by her look and manner she might have been born a countess, to all of which and much more I replied mentally, 'Yes, George IVth'."<sup>5</sup>

But it was not as a countess that Ruskin considered Lizzie Siddal. With eyes that saw deeper than most into that lonely and courageous soul, he read at once the bitterness of her struggle: her indomitable fight against the relentless disease that was already apparent in the rose blossoming of her cheeks; her valiant efforts, perched precariously as she was upon the world of limbo, to maintain the respectability that had been urged upon her as a child; her concentrated efforts, in the face of difficulties immense, to grow to the brilliant double stature of the man she loved. Perhaps Elizabeth Siddal, on looking into those strange blue eyes, put off for once the protective badinage with which usually she hoped to cover the melancholy secret of her inner soul: perhaps Ruskin even read her spirit through her words. ". . . My feeling is that it would be best for you to marry," he wrote to Rossetti on 30 April, "for the sake of giving Miss Siddal complete protection and care, and putting an end to the peculiar sadness, and want of you hardly know what, that there is in both of you. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Nothing could have exceeded the tact and delicacy with which

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, ed. G. B. Hill, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 2, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> G. B. Hill, *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of 30.4.1855: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 200.



Ruskin offered substantial financial help to this tragic, proud, and gifted woman. When the message that he sent her through Rossetti failed to overcome her diffidence—the deep, inbred, aversion of the middle class from accepting large favours from strangers, that Rossetti, true Bohemian that he was, had never known, and could not understand—he wrote to her: “The world is an odd world. People think nothing of taking my *time* from me every day of my life (which is to me life, money, power, all in all). They take that, without thanks, for no need, for the most trivial purposes, and would have me lose a whole day to leave a card with their footmen; and *you*, for life’s sake, will not take that for which I have no use—you are too proud. You would not be too proud to let a nurse or friend give up some of her time, if you needed it, to watch by you and take care of you. What is the difference between their giving time and watchfulness, and my giving such help as I can?”

“Perhaps I have said too much of my wish to do this for Rossetti’s sake. But, if you do not choose to be helped for his sake, consider also the plain *hard fact* is that I think you have genius; that I don’t think there is much genius in the world; and I want to keep what there is, in it, heaven having, I suppose, enough for all its purposes. Utterly irrespective of Rossetti’s feelings or my own, I should simply do what I do, if I could, as I should try to save a beautiful tree from being cut down, or a bit of Gothic cathedral whose strength was failing. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Miss Siddal, who knew herself too ill to promise regular work, and whose sense of honour was too high to accept money for a dubious return, was at last won over: and a few days later Rossetti wrote in high fettle to his aunt Charlotte. “Mr. Ruskin has now settled on her £150 a year, and is to have all she does up to that sum. He is likely also to be of great use to me personally (for the use to her is also use to me) and I am doing two or three water-colours for him. He is the best friend I ever had *out of my own family*; or at any rate I never had a better, not to do injustice to one or two more.”<sup>2</sup>

That Ruskin’s concern for Lizzie Siddal—Ida, as he was to call her later, identifying her with Tennyson’s *Princess*—was dictated largely by his concern for Rossetti is clearly seen from the letter that he was shortly to send to Henry Acland, whose help he wished to enlist on her behalf. “One of the chief hindrances to his progress in art has been his sorrow at the state of the young girl, some of whose work I showed you. I fear this sorrow will soon be healed—and with what effect upon him I cannot tell; I see that his attachment to her is very deep, but how far he is prepared for the loss I know not. . . .”<sup>3</sup> Carefully he explained Miss Siddal’s tragic circumstances that had touched him so deeply: how a London physician had reported recently that one of her lungs was seriously affected: how her family

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 62–64.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, undated; *Works*, vol. 36, p. 205.

sternly disapproved of her desire to become an artist, so that on bitter winter evenings she was compelled to retire to her bedroom and draw without a fire: and asked if Acland would examine her himself, advise her practically about her condition, find her suitable lodgings, and send her for a rest cure to the place he considered best.

"I hold it of the very highest importance that you should let Dr. Acland see you," he told the reluctant Lizzie, who had already declined, at a friend's suggestion, to enter a sanatorium run by a lady in Harley Street, New Road, where "governesses and ladies of small means were taken in and cured"; "because he will take that thoughtful and tender care in thinking of your case which only a good and very unusually sympathetic man is capable of."<sup>1</sup>

Shortly afterwards Miss Siddal, accompanied by Rossetti, went to Oxford, and Dr. Acland is reported to have said that, although the patient must be absolutely idle, as yet, he thought, she suffered from no really unarrestable or infixed disease, but that her chief danger lay in "mental power long pent up and lately overtaxed",<sup>2</sup> a diagnosis which was either erroneous, or else deliberately softened by Ruskin in order not to give pain to Rossetti. "I went to Oxford some weeks ago when Guggum was there," he wrote shortly afterwards to his mother, "and met some nice people, Dr. Acland and his family, who, as well as many others, were most kind to her there—too kind, for they bothered her greatly with attentions. Acland wanted her to settle at Oxford, and said he would introduce her to all the best society. All the women there are immensely fond of her—a sister of Dr. Pusey (or daughter) seems to have been the one she liked best. . . . Acland examined her most minutely, and was constantly paying professional visits—all gratuitously, being an intimate friend of Ruskin."<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to know how much of this was due to Rossetti's spontaneous enthusiasm for his adored "Guggum", or how much it was a deliberate attempt to impress the mother who had hitherto always regarded Miss Siddal with a tacit but implacable disapproval. For from a letter written by Ruskin to Acland after her return, it seems that she had allowed a characteristic waywardness full play. "I don't know exactly how that wilful Ida has behaved to you," he grumbled frankly. "As far as I can make out, she is not ungrateful but sick, and sickly head-strong—much better, however, for what Henry has done for her. But I find trying to be of use to people is the most wearying thing possible. The true secret of happiness would be to bolt one's gates, lie on the grass all day, take care not to eat too much dinner, and buy as many Turners as one could afford. These geniuses are all alike, little and big. I have known five of them—Turner, Watts, Millais, Rossetti and this girl—and I don't know which was, or which is, wrongheadedest."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 10.7.1855: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 217.

The relationship between Ruskin and Rossetti, in these early years, was one of exuberant friendliness laced with intermittent hostility caused by a fundamental incompatibility of temperament. Both passionately devoted to art, they were nevertheless essentially irreconcilable types. Ruskin, by education, tradition and inclination the pure type of the rich bourgeois, taking a high standard of personal comfort and domestic order for granted—an English Swann without social aspirations who advised great ladies over their pictures and their drawings, sent his man to leave cards at imposing mansions, and bought his clothes at the most fashionable shops; and Rossetti, the pure type of the Bohemian, reared in an atmosphere of poetry and passionate political discussion, who ate at all hours, bought hot potatoes from barrows in the streets, talked until five o'clock in the morning and got up at noon, borrowed right and left from his family and friends money that he had no intention of returning, good-humouredly contradicted everyone, and always gravitated to an atmosphere of disorder and picturesque squalor. William Rossetti, that shrewd, kindly and impartial observer, seems to have understood their relations better than many who came after him. "Mr. Ruskin," he wrote, "took keen delight in Rossetti's paintings and designs. He praised freely, and abused heartily, both him and them. The abuse was good-humoured, and taken good-humouredly. . . . They were heartily friendly, and indeed heartily affectionate, and took in good part, with mutual banter and amusement, whatever was deficient or excessive in the performances of the painter, or in the comments of the purchaser and critic."<sup>1</sup> Although, superficially, Rossetti had the warmer and more expansive nature, it was Ruskin who was truly the more affectionate man of the two, and Ruskin who gave most of himself, and with greater sincerity, to their friendship. Rossetti's boisterously warm and Southern temperament concealed an egotism that rarely gave affection where it could not dominate; and his friendships were but seldom unalloyed with an unexpectedly shrewd and stubborn admixture of self-interest. Ruskin, on the other hand, could never adapt himself to the practical limitations of the critical function. Even yet he had not fully learned that artists need appreciation rather than criticism, not because they are necessarily obtusely unaware of the defects of their own work, but because the practice of art implies a clear understanding both of difficulties and of limitations. Every artist, if he could, would paint with the genius of a Titian, a Rembrandt or a Gauguin; just as every writer, if he could, would write with the genius of a Shakespeare, a Tolstoy or a Proust. That he does not do so is due to fundamental incapacity. Ruskin knew this as well as any man. Many times he explained that great painters

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti: *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 180-1.

are born, and can never be made. Boldness or slovenliness, however, he considered should be attacked without mercy; and Rossetti often became a target for astringent strictures. But Rossetti, as his brother understood, "like most artists of any inventive genius, was at bottom scornful of art critics. He was not in the least self-satisfied as to his own performances—on the contrary, he looked upon them with a good deal of disfavour, as being inadequate expressions of the adequate idea which was within him; still he considered that an artist generally knows what he is about much better than any outsider can instruct him"<sup>1</sup>—and frequently he would complain to Brown that Ruskin had been sticking pins in him, as was his wont for a couple of hours every three days.

But if Ruskin was exacting, he was also generous. "Don't annoy yourself about anything you owe me," he wrote Rossetti when he appeared anxious, "but do your commissions for other people and Llandaff as fast as you can." The effect that such munificence had upon the improvident painter was soon apparent enough, for by the end of the year Rossetti had been able completely to renew his wardrobe. "Gabriel was such a swell as I never saw before," Brown noted on 31 December, 1855, "but looking really splendid, everything about him in perfect taste except his *shoes*: it will be some time before he goes that length."<sup>2</sup>

During 1855, indeed, every hospitality of Denmark Hill was extended to the Rossetti family: William was invited to bring his friends to see the Turners whenever he felt inclined; and the carriage was sent to bring the talented and retiring Christina to dine. Meanwhile Rossetti continued dilatory and erratic in the extreme. "In your growling letter you are Grief, and I am Patience on the monument," wrote Ruskin, whose humour never deserted him for long. "Nothing but Patience *in propria persona* could stand it. If the drawing is sent on Monday, my address is Ship Hotel, Dover. If Tuesday, ditto. If the week after next, Denmark Hill. If next year, I don't exactly know where."<sup>3</sup>

Once when Ruskin happened to require a sketch of some rocks in the bed of a stream, with trees above it, and enquired of Rossetti whether, funds being provided, he could take a run into Wales and do the work on a specific date, otherwise it would be too late, Rossetti asked if he could have the money to go to Paris instead to see Lizzie, who was there for her rest cure; which caused Ruskin to remark, not inappropriately, that Rossetti was a very odd creature to deal with indeed. And to be sure he was. He would ask Ruskin for an advance on some work in progress, spend the money, and then put the work aside for something else. But though Ruskin would often buy a new

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 192, 48.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

work for cash, even when Rossetti owed him both work and money, the purse strings were still controlled by the shrewd and cautious John James, and it was not always that he could be as generous as he wished: "If you would but do the things I *want* it would be so much easier," he complained. "That *Matilda* I commissioned ages ago I could buy, because I have a reason to give, but the *Monk Illuminating* I can't."<sup>1</sup>

Wishing to advance Rossetti's career in every possible way, Ruskin soon tried to persuade him to stand as a member for the Old Water Colour Society. "I don't think there is the least risk of your rejection," he wrote, "because Lewis is wholly for you, and the others know that you are a friend of mine, and that I am going to write a 'notice' in 1857 as well as 1856. I don't say that, if they rejected you, I might feel disposed to go into further analysis of some of their own works than might be altogether pleasant. But don't you think *they* will suppose so, and that your election is therefore rather safe. But suppose the reverse. All that could be said was that they rejected—not Rossetti but Pre-Raphaelitism. Which people knew pretty well before. . . ."<sup>2</sup> But Rossetti was not to be cajoled by this suggested subtle moral blackmail, and, as usual, refused to risk the chance of a rebuff.

Clearly the Bohemian life was too much for Ruskin. "You and Ida are a couple of—never mind—but you know it's all *your own pride*—not a bit of fine feeling, so don't think it—" he wrote on one occasion. "If you wanted to oblige *me*, you would keep your room in order and go to bed at night."<sup>3</sup> And to Miss Siddal, who was still trying vainly to recuperate on the Continent, he complained early in 1856. "Certainly, Ida, you and Rossetti have infected me with your ways of going on. Never did I leave a letter so long in hand before. One would think I had to scratch out every word and put it in again, as Rossetti always does when he is in any special hurry."<sup>4</sup>

In August 1856, Ruskin, having read with intense appreciation *The Burden of Nineveh* in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, suddenly discovered that Rossetti was a poet. "It is glorious,"<sup>5</sup> he had written him, on his first perusal, and asked if he could find out the author so that he could get to know him. But even this did not prevent him from continuing his relentless pin-pricks. "As a general rule, never put raw green into *light* flesh. No great colourists ever did, or ever wisely will. This drawing by candlelight is all over black spots in the high lights. The thought is very beautiful—the colour and male heads by no means up to your mark."<sup>6</sup> And when he saw a

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107-8.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 148-9.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>5</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 157.

drawing that Rossetti had done for C. E. Norton, he so much feared that it would not only disappoint his friend, but "put an end to all chance of R.'s reputation ever beginning in America",<sup>1</sup> that he sent one of his own favourite pencil sketches with it, as a "Thing such as none but R. could do". Again, he wrote: "I must see Ida. I want to tell her one or two things about her way of study. I can't bear to see her missing her mark only by a few inches."<sup>2</sup> And when Rossetti ventured to disagree—"You are a conceited monkey, thinking your pictures right when I tell you positively they are wrong. What do you know about the matter, I should like to know?"<sup>3</sup>

As Rossetti's colours proved themselves impermanent, complaints and lamentations continued to pour out. "My pet lady in blue is gone all to nothing, the green having evaporated or sunk into the dress—I send her back for you to look at—and think the scarlet has faded on the shoe." "You must really alter your way of working, and mind what you are about." On other occasions, the only way to make Rossetti work seemed to be to throw him into prison. "We will have the cell made nice, airy, cheery and tidy, and you'll get on. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

More distressing than any disagreements over Rossetti's work, however, was the implacable hostility adopted towards Ruskin by Madox Brown. Most industrious and most neglected of painters, most generous and most faithful of friends, Brown could never get over the fact that Ruskin ignored his work. He may have even been aware that Ruskin advised people who consulted his advice not to buy it. That Ruskin could not and did not admire the works of that painter whom, years later, the young Hall Caine was to find as "sententious as Dr. Johnson" was not a matter that could have been avoided. Yet had he known all the valiant struggles of that patient and conscientious man, the poverty of his little house at Finchley with the maid that he was able to pay no more than £5 a year; the frequent pawnings of pathetic trifles; the joy of finding a few odd shillings tucked away in a drawer, and the touchingly cheap jewellery bought for Emma in celebration of the most modest sale, it is unlikely that he would have counselled Miss Heaton, as he did, not to buy his works. Doubtless it was rankling enough to be invited home to dine by Rossetti, only to find, upon arrival, that his friend had forgotten all about it, and had gone instead to dine in state at Denmark Hill. "The Great Prohibited" Rossetti called Ruskin, for Brown's edification, who treated the dissension rather as a joke.

"Received a disagreeable intelligence," Madox Brown commented on 6 April, 1855. "John P. Seddon is building a cathedral in Wales; he has persuaded the Bishop to have a painting on the altar, and his

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, 10.12.1859, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 183-4.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 288.

brother asks if I think *Rossetti would* undertake it—when he has bought my *King Lear* at an auction for £15, and knows I am on the point of being driven out of England through general neglect. It is to toady to Ruskin. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

When Ruskin sent Rossetti “a stunner called the Marchioness of Waterford, who had expressed a wish to see him paint in water-colours . . . an excellent artist, who would have been really great, he believed, if she had not been born such a swell and such a stunner . . .”<sup>2</sup> and Lady Waterford wanted Rossetti to give her lessons, Madox Brown not only advised Rossetti against it, but even helped him to concoct a letter of refusal, for no other reason, it would seem, than to exercise his influence in a contrary direction. And when the two men met, according to Madox Brown’s own account, it was a disaster. “When I was smoking a pipe in shirtsleeves, enter to us Ruskin. I smoke; he talks divers nonsense about art hurriedly in shrill flippant tones. I answer him civilly, then resume my coat and prepare to leave. Suddenly upon this he says: ‘Mr. Brown, will you tell me why you chose such an ugly subject for your last picture?’ I, dumb-founded at such a beginning from a stranger, look in his face expectant of some *qualification*, and ask: ‘What picture?’ To which he looking defyingly, answers: ‘Your picture at the British Exhibition. What made you take such an ugly subject? It was a pity, for there was some nice painting in it.’ I . . . being satisfied that he intended impertinence, replied contemptuously, ‘Because it lay out of my back window,’ and turning on my heel took my hat and wished Gabriel good-bye! Ruskin would not look at me as I left the room. It would appear that his vanity was hurt at my not hanging longer on his skirts, and vented itself in impertinence.”<sup>3</sup>

While in 1857, when meetings were held at Denmark Hill in order to arrange the Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition which was opened that summer in Russell Place, he wrote to the amiable William Rossetti: “As I suppose it would look too pointed were I to hold off from going to the meetings at Ruskin’s longer, I will go to that on Monday, and be with you in conveyance by six p.m., which I suppose will be in time, and shall consider myself in the light of a martyr to duty thenceforth and forever, and if he insults me, as I know he cannot well avoid from his nature, I shall visit it upon you, and abuse you behind your back for the next three months, and say subtle, spiteful things in your presence which you will not be able to notice.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, on this occasion, he found the man who looked like “a cross between a fiend and a tallow chandler” “quite young and rompish”—though he noted acidly that the tea table was “overcharged with cakes and

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 166.

sweets as for a juvenile party. Then about an hour later cake and wine were again produced, of which Ruskin (whose power and eloquence as a speaker he admitted to be Homeric) again partook largely, reaching out with his thin paw and swiftly absorbing three or four lumps of cake in succession".<sup>1</sup> Madox Brown, however, was a notoriously proud and touchy fellow. When the genial Millais had visited him in the previous May, he recorded characteristically: "Answered Millais, who has kindly offered to patronise me, but shan't. Told me that he had revolutionised the Academy, or very nearly so."<sup>2</sup>

It is probable that, since, as he was to tell Miss Heaton some years later, he would willingly praise Madox Brown in his books, seeing that he was an entirely worthy fellow, "but pictures are pictures, and things that aren't, aren't",<sup>3</sup> Ruskin was sometimes disagreeable to Brown out of sheer embarrassment. As he had to write to Furnivall apropos another gentleman who had considered himself insulted by Ruskin's manner: "People don't know how shy I am, from not having ever gone into Society until I was seventeen. I forget who it is who says that the mixture of hesitation and forced impudence which shy people fall into is the worst of all possible manners. So I find it."<sup>4</sup>

And so, unfortunately, did Madox Brown.

<sup>1</sup> F. M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown: A Record*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters*, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 12.3.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 406.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 5.12.1852: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 144.



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## Chapter II

1. *The Working Men's College: Ruskin and Rossetti hold classes for Art: Ruskin's popularity.* 2. *New friendships: William Ward and George Allen: Smetham: his visit to Denmark Hill: portrait by William Rossetti.* 3. *Octavia Hill: her joy in Ruskin's friendship: he teaches her drawing and gives her work.* 4. *Charles Eliot Norton: Carlyle: the Brownings: a party at Patmore's: Little Holland House.*

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“**W**HEN you have taken to your rooms again,” Ruskin wrote to Rossetti in October 1854, “please write me a word, as I have a great deal to say about plans for teaching the workmen this winter.” “Ruskin is back again,” Rossetti told Allingham a few days later. “He has written saying he wants to consult with me about plans for ‘teaching the masons’; so you may soon expect to find every man shoulder his hod ‘with upturned fervid face and hair put back’.”<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later, he added: “He has been back about a month or so, looking very well and in excellent spirits. Perhaps you know that he has joined Maurice’s scheme for a Working Men’s College, which has now begun to be put in operation at 31, Red Lion Square. Ruskin has most liberally undertaken a drawing class, which he attends every Thursday evening, and he and I had a long confab about plans for teaching. He is most enthusiastic about it, and has so infected me that I think of offering an evening weekly for the same purpose when I am settled in town again.”<sup>2</sup>

The Working Men’s College, the first serious attempt made in England to help workmen to attain a full and satisfactory life, not by following the great social illusion of rising into a different class, but by simply fulfilling the most urgent needs of intellect and spirit, had been founded by Frederick Denison Maurice, Lowes Dickinson and others, on 31 October, 1854, in an old house in Red Lion Square. In principle, it was the outcome of two converging influences—Chartism, and the new school of Christian Socialists. What Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, Ruskin’s *On the Nature of Gothic*, Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*, Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, and Maurice’s *Broad Church Sermons* represented in the world of letters, the Working Men’s College represented in the sphere of practical education. It was an attempt to produce, through an affectional link between the master and labouring classes, a new type of social democracy based upon mutual respect and understanding, culture, order and goodwill. The

<sup>1</sup> G. B. Hill, *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

extremely gifted group of men who had dedicated themselves to the venture were for the most part young enough to be fired by the force of an ideal. Maurice, the oldest, was verging upon fifty; Litchfield, the youngest, was twenty-two; but apart from these exceptions, the average age of the masters was between thirty and thirty-five. The courses offered were varied, and, for the most part, of a practical nature. F. D. Maurice himself lectured on three evenings a week, on King John, illustrated by Shakespeare's play; on Political Terms illustrated by English literature; and, on Sunday nights, upon the Gospel of St. John. Hughes and Walsh lectured on Public Health; Ludlow on the Law of Partnership; Brewer on the Geography of England as connected with History; Furnivall on English Grammar; Westlake and Litchfield on Arithmetic and Algebra. In addition there were classes in Geometry, Mechanics, Natural Philosophy and Astronomy. Thomas Hughes taught gymnastics; Lowes Dickinson and Ruskin each had separate classes in drawing, and Rossetti had a class for painting. Later, Ford Madox Brown, who, with Christina Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites, had already held classes for artisans in Camden Town, also taught drawing, as did Burne-Jones; while Woolner held a class in modelling. It was Furnivall—Furnivall with his "seraph brow, and sweetly happy mouth, and great dark eyes, and a provoking, self-willed, arbitrary way of behaving"<sup>1</sup>—and Maurice, however, who were the guiding lights of the College; and after a conversazione to which the pupils had been invited to bring guests, the enthusiastic young Octavia Hill wrote to a friend a vivid impression of these two leaders. "There stood Mr. Maurice, his grave face lighted by a smile of delight and sweetness in the realisation of much that he had worked for. And here and there and everywhere glanced the fire of Mr. Furnivall's intensely joyous eyes, delighting in all things, seeing everyone, utterly unconscious of himself, doing all that was needed, his soul dwelling continually in sympathy as deep as it is strong."<sup>2</sup>

That Ruskin should have been drawn into the venture, given his precise mixture of qualities and ideals, was as inevitable as that water should find its own level: and it is significant that it was his section upon *The Nature of Gothic*, extracted from *The Stones of Venice*, that was used at public meetings in order to arouse the interest of the uninitiated. Dr. John Brown had already suggested to Ruskin that *The Nature of Gothic* might be published by itself as a cheap pamphlet, but although Ruskin had asked his father to make the suggestion to Smith, Elder's, nothing had come of it. Now, at Furnivall's suggestion, a reprint, with the sub-title *And herein of the True Functions of the Workman in Art* was produced, by arrangement with the publishers, elsewhere. "I don't want to move in the matter of the chapter

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

myself, having been pamphleteering etc. as much as I care to do lately, and they say I merely get up *jobs* for Smith and Elder," Ruskin wrote to Furnivall on 19 October. "Print the chapter as you think best, just as it is—saying, if you like, 'by the author's permission for the Workmen's College'. If you lose by it, I will stand the loss; if you make anything, give it to the College funds."<sup>1</sup> Several hundreds of the pamphlet were distributed free, and the work was officially put on sale for the price of fourpence, and, later, when a wrapper and woodcut were added, sixpence.

Ruskin threw himself into the work with characteristic energy and generosity. He provided his class with the finest and most expensive materials; he took pains to get the classroom left open during the day so that any men who wished might go to practise; but he was never interested in any department other than his own, and, like all intensely practical men, was heartily impatient of continual committee meetings for discussing future plans. "Hardly a fortnight has passed since the College began without some new plan," he wrote to Furnivall from Tunbridge Wells on 22 May, 1855. "I cannot worry myself with this everlasting 'What is to be done?' Maurice must manage the College, and I will teach there, minding my own business."<sup>2</sup>

For the first few months, Ruskin and Rossetti taught in the same class on Thursday evenings; but the following spring this arrangement was altered, and Ruskin and Lowes Dickinson held a class for elementary landscape, while Rossetti had his own class for the figure. "I began my class last night at the Working Men's College: it is for the figure, quite a separate thing from Ruskin's, who teaches foliage. The class proceeds on quite a family footing, and I feel sure will prove amusing. Ruskin's class has progressed astonishingly, and I must try to keep pace with him,"<sup>3</sup> he told Allingham soon afterwards. "You think I have turned humanitarian perhaps," Rossetti wrote to W. B. Scott about the same time, "but you should see my class for the model! None of your *Freehand Drawing Books* used! The British mind is brought to bear on the British *mug* at once, and with results that would astonish you."<sup>4</sup>

On one famous occasion, when Ruskin was absent from his class, Rossetti decided to do the honours instead, and to his great astonishment found everyone making studies in blue. "But can't any of you see any colour but blue?" he demanded suddenly, and was informed that they were using blue in accordance with Ruskin's instructions. "But where do you get all this Prussian blue from?" he asked, and, the next moment, opening a cupboard, discovered for himself. "Well, I can't allow it," Rossetti imperturbably declared. "Mr. Ruskin will spoil everybody's eye for colour. I shall confiscate the whole lot,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from John Ruskin to F. J. Furnivall*, ed. T. J. Wise, privately printed, 1897, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

in the interests of his and my pupils. You must simply say that I've taken the stuff away."<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, when he was told of the incident, rocked with laughter. Always appreciative of Rossetti's grave or gay activities, he wrote later that "he was the only one of our modern painters who taught disciples for the love of them".<sup>2</sup>

But, genial and even affectionate as Ruskin was with his class, there were times when he could be bitterly caustic. One day a conceited pupil arranged his drawing in a conspicuous position where it could not fail to claim the attention of anyone entering the room. Not contented with this, when Ruskin arrived, he seized his arm, and remarked complacently, "Doesn't it look well from here, sir?" "Not to my mind," said Ruskin curtly; and passed on.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, whenever he saw a promising piece of work his face would light up; and he was often inclined to be over-lavish of his praise. It was never Ruskin's intention that any of his pupils at the College should become professional artists. Like Rossetti, who thought that every man should be an artist, he believed that every man would be benefited by the powers of accurate observation and the joy of composition that the capacity to draw bestows. This was made perfectly clear in the original memorandum of information issued to students who intended to join his class, in which he stated: "The teacher of landscape drawing wishes it to be generally understood by all his pupils that the instruction given in his class is not intended either to fit them for becoming artists, or in any direct manner to advance their skill in the occupations they at present follow. They are taught drawing, primarily in order to direct their attention accurately to the beauty of God's work in the material universe; and, secondarily, that they may be enabled to record, with some degree of truth, the forms and colours of objects when such record is likely to be useful."<sup>4</sup>

In his teaching at the Working Men's College, Ruskin followed no specific system, but adapted his methods to each student, in accordance with his capacities. One man he would set to copy the intricate markings of a piece of fluorspar dropped into a glass of water: another would be given as a subject lichen and fungi brought specially from Anerley Woods. William Rossetti has recorded that he "taught upon a rather peculiar system, which amounted to regarding the object to be copied as a series of planes varying in their degrees of lighting or shadowing, and drawing it as such without much, or without any, preliminary outlining".<sup>5</sup> As the mood and the opportunity occurred, he would bring for the benefit of his class a case of brilliant tropical birds; a valuable missal; a Dürer woodcut, or his Turner drawings. He

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 486.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 5, p. xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to F. J. Furnivall*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 181.

commissioned William Hunt to paint two special subjects, to show his pupils how a master can invest even the humblest objects with a magic beauty. One of these was a group of eggs and onions, the other a dried herring, lustrous and metallic as gold, with some open mussel shells.

There were occasions when drawing would be laid aside, on account of some unexpected question, for brilliant disquisitions on 30 themes; and sometimes he would give formal lectures and addresses to the whole College. Long before Trades Union Congresses were thought of, Ruskin suggested that, if they chose, working men could appoint their own parliament to consider means for the proper regulation of industry; and that this was the most fitting manner of making their voices heard.

But though, when in England, Ruskin taught regularly at the Working Men's College from 1854 to 1858, and again in the spring of 1860, his habits as a teacher were of an unorthodox prodigality. The passion to share such good things of the world as he possessed which was to dominate him all his life, was now beginning to reach its height; and there were memorable occasions when his entire class was invited to view the Turners and take tea at Denmark Hill, or spend an afternoon sketching in the country, cabs being ordered to take the men from Camberwell Green to the chosen spot, and a sumptuous tea provided afterwards at the Greyhound Inn.

Even the acidulous Brown was compelled to admit that in his capacity of teacher at the Working Men's College, Ruskin was a success. "At night went with Gabriel to the Working Men's College," he recorded on 19 March, 1858. "There was a public meeting: and we heard Professor Maurice and Ruskin spouting. Ruskin was eloquent as ever, and as wildly popular with the men."<sup>1</sup>

By now, indeed, Ruskin had become the most accomplished lecturer. Rossetti later described to the young Hall Caine how, once, when Ruskin had consented to lecture upon some special occasion, he made no special preparations of any kind. "I know he did not—we were together at his father's house the whole of the day. At night we drove down to the College, and then he made the most finished speech I ever heard. I doubted at the time if any written words of his were equal to it—such flaming diction, such emphasis, such appeal."

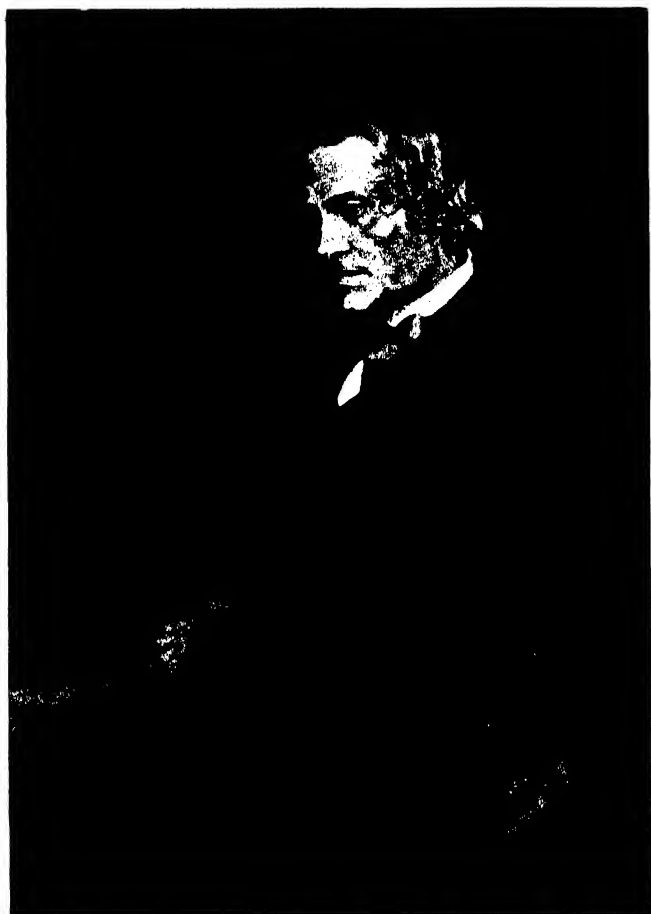
Ruskin's active interest in the Working Men's College was to endure for many years: and when he finally failed in active attendance, it was because he felt that his efforts were fruitless to produce any positive results. "It is not from any failure in my interest in this class that I have ceased from personal attendance," he wrote to F. D. Maurice on 2 November, 1867. "But I ascertained beyond all question that the faculty which my own method of teaching chiefly regarded was necessarily absent in men trained to mechanical toil,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, op. cit., p. 90.

1877  
1877  
1877



XIX. OCTAVIA HILL, 1877  
*From a drawing by Edward Clifford*



XX. BENJAMIN WOODWARD  
Architect of the Oxford Museum  
*From a photograph*

that my words and thoughts respecting beautiful things were unintelligible when the eye had been accustomed to the frightfulness of modern city life."

## 2

Several of the acquaintanceships that Ruskin made at the Working Men's College were to endure for many years, and even to ripen into friendship. And although his avowed aim was to make his pupils happier in their present conditions, and not to encourage them to alter their material circumstances, some of them later became permanently attached to Ruskin or eventually adopted quite new professions. There was William Ward, a city clerk, son of a commercial traveller, who enrolled himself as a pupil at the Working Men's College on account of his enthusiasm for *The Stones of Venice*, and who showed such extraordinary aptitude and proficiency that after two years Ruskin advised him to become a drawing master, and sent him for pupils many of the ladies who applied to him personally for instruction. There was Arthur Burgess, draughtsman and wood cutter, who died young. There was W. Jefferey, who became a successful photographer: John Bunney, who painted architectural detail with such precision that later Ruskin employed him to make detailed drawings for record purposes over a wide period of years; and E. Cooke, who also became a drawing master of so great an enthusiasm and so keen a vision, that there are still living those who remember the pleasure with which they learnt under him. Finally there was George Allen, a joiner employed upon constructing the interior fittings of Dorchester House, who, having, at Ruskin's instigation, studied under Lupton and Le Keux, became a proficient engraver, and later refused offers to become Superintendent of the Furnishing of the Royal Palaces of Queen Victoria, and a partner in charge of the furniture in Morris and Co., in order to remain Ruskin's principal assistant, and eventually his publisher.

Amongst others who desired to take advantage of Ruskin's attendance at the Working Men's College was William Rossetti, who enrolled himself as a pupil in 1857. "I should be delighted to have you . . . but I don't understand at all," Ruskin replied to his letter. "Why in the world shouldn't you work under your brother? and what will people say about your being in my class instead of his?"<sup>1</sup> But the devoted William knew too well the vagaries of his talented brother, and preferred to put himself under Ruskin's guidance. Finding himself, however, after a few months only "a reasonably fair scholar, but far indeed from being among the best"<sup>2</sup> he soon tired of this new diversion, and gave it up.

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 181.



Then there was the talented and ill fated young James Smetham, who arrived at the College with a series of drawing books which gave Ruskin so much delight that he insisted upon taking them home. "I am quite amazed, almost awed, by the amount of talent and industry and thoughtfulness shown in these books of yours," he wrote enthusiastically a few days later. "What is the nature of your artistic occupation? I am very anxious to know all that you are willing to tell me about yourself. Please let me keep the volumes at least till Tuesday next. I cannot look over them properly sooner; and meantime send me a line, if I may ask you to take this trouble, telling me what your real employment in life has been, and how your genius has been employed or *unemployed* in it."<sup>1</sup>

Three months later, in February 1855, Smetham paid his first visit to Denmark Hill. His description of the event provides a very vivid conversation piece of the Ruskin family at this time . . . "I will tell you," he wrote to a friend, "that he has a large house with a lodge, and a valet and footman and coachman, and grand rooms glittering with pictures, chiefly Turners. . . . His father is a fine old gentleman who has a lot of bushy grey hair, and eyebrows sticking up all rough and knowing, with a comfortable way of coming up to you with his hands in his pockets and making *you* comfortable, and saying . . . that 'John's' prose works are pretty good. His mother is a ruddy, dignified, richly dressed old gentlewoman of seventy-five, who knows Chamouni better than Camberwell: evidently a *good* old lady, with the *Christian Treasury* tossing about on the table. She puts 'John' down and holds her own opinions, and flatly contradicts him; and he receives all her opinions with a soft reverence and gentleness that is pleasant to witness.

"The old gentleman amused me twice during the evening by standing over me and enlightening me on the subject of my own merits, with the air of a man who thought that I had not the remotest conception of my own abilities, and had therefore come to 'threap me down' about them. 'I never saw anything to equal them (the sketches). Why, it seems to me the labour of a life.' . . . And for fear lest I should lose or injure them in taking them back, he sent me home in his carriage.

"The old lady was as quaintly kind. 'Has John showed you this?' 'Has John shown you the other?' 'John, fetch Coutets for Mr. Smetham to see'; and to all her sudden injunctions he replied by waiting on me in a way to make me ashamed. 'You must come in the daylight, John has heaps of things to show you. . . .' 'As these are in reality traits in John's character, I have given you them at length. I wish I could reproduce a good impression of John for you, to give you the notion of his perfect gentleness and lowliness.'

"He certainly bursts out with a remark, and in a contradictory

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 15.11.1854: *Works*, vol. 14, p. 460.

way, but only because he believes it, with no air of dogmatism or conceit. He is different at home from that which he is in a lecture before a mixed audience, and there is a spiritual sweetness in the half-timid expression of his eyes, and in bowing to you, as in taking wine, with (if I heard aright) 'I drink to thee', he had a look that has followed me, a look bordering on the tearful.

"He spent some time in this way. Unhanging a Turner from the wall of a distant room, he brought it to the table and put it into my hands; then we talked; then he went up into his study to fetch down some illustrative print or drawing; in one case, a literal view which he had travelled fifty miles to make, in order to compare with the picture. And so he kept on gliding all over the house, hanging and unhanging, and stopping a few minutes to talk. There would have been, if I had not seen from the first moment that he knew me well, something embarrassing in the chivalrous, hovering way he had; as it was, I felt much otherwise, quite as free and open as with you in your little study. To *his* study we went at last, and over the fire, with the winter wind sounding, we spoke, as you and I speak, about things I should be sorry to open my heart concerning to scarcely any; only of course he guided the conversation. . . .

"Over the chimney piece of the study was a copy he had made from Tintoret, a Doge in his robes adoring the infant Saviour . . . he had two drawings, portraits of Turner, one done by Count d'Orsay.

"At the door. 'We shall hope to see you again (reiterated by the old gentleman and lady), and you will allow me some day to come and look at *your* pictures;' and taking my hand in both his with great gentleness, and looking in my face, murmured (I think) 'The Lord be with you'. As I had got quite enough for my money I 'chevied', and was in a sort of soft dream all the way home; nor has the fragrance which, like the June sunset,

Dwells in heaven half the night,

left my spirit yet."<sup>1</sup>

William Rossetti, who first knew him about the same time, has also left a vivid portrait of the author of *Modern Painters*. "Ruskin was then nearly thirty-six years of age," he wrote later in his *Reminiscences*, "of fair stature, exceedingly thin (I have sometimes laid a light grasp on his coat sleeve, and there seemed to be next to nothing inside it), narrow shouldered, with a clear, bright complexion, very thick yellow hair, beetling eyebrows (which he inherited from his father), and side whiskers. His nose was acute and prominent, his eyes blue and limpid, the general impression of his face singularly keen, with an ample allowance of self-confidence, but without that hard and unindulgent air which sometimes accompanies keenness. His mouth was unshapely, having (as I was afterwards informed) been

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of James Smetbam* (1892), pp. 62-6.

damaged by the bite of a dog in early childhood. He had a sunny smile, however, which went far to atoning for any defect of the mouth. The cheek bones were prominent, the facial angle receding somewhat below the tip of the nose. As my brother's report of Ruskin's personal appearance had never been eulogistic, I was agreeably impressed by what I saw of his looks, as well as by his voice and manner. There was a perceptible Scottish tone in his speech, with a slight Northumbrian burr."<sup>1</sup> No less significant were his observations of Ruskin in relation to his parents. "He was necessarily regarded by them as a 'shining light' who has done and would continue to do very considerable things in the realm of thought; none the less, he was their boy, living *en famille* as the subordinate member of the household. And his own demeanour, so far as I ever witnessed it, was in full conformity with this estimate of the filial relation."<sup>2</sup>

## 3

Another protégée who has left many vivid impressions of the John Ruskin of these days was the ardent and generous young Octavia Hill. Ruskin had met her first when, as a young girl of fifteen, she was intimately associated with the Ladies' Guild, and he had placed an order for some painted glass shelves and a table painted with a spray of bramble leaves in autumn encircling a centre space suggesting the passing of a storm, and interspersed with some words from one of the Psalms.

"If you had seen the kind and gentle way in which he spoke, the interest he showed, the noble way he treated every subject, the pretty way in which he gave his order, and, lastly, if you had seen him as he said on going away, 'I wish you all success with all my heart', you would have said with me that it was utterly wonderful to think that that was the man who was accused of being 'mad, presumptuous, conceited and prejudiced'."<sup>3</sup> Thereafter Ruskin, with F. D. Maurice, was to remain an idol for many years; and when, in 1855, Ruskin invited her to Denmark Hill and offered to teach her drawing, her happiness was unbounded. "If one has Maurice and Ruskin in one's youth," she wrote to a friend fourteen years afterwards, "one ought surely to share the light they gave." "There is only one thing to speak about," she wrote excitedly to her sister after this first visit—"Ruskin." And minutely she described the "handsome mansion set before a broad sweep of gravel road", the lawn upon which stood an immense cedar of Lebanon, the golden celandines in flower, the spacious hall, the pleasant footman, the dining-room with its red flock paper and almost purple chairs, and Ruskin's lofty study,

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> E. Moberley Bell, *Octavia Hill*, pp. 31-2.

"the furniture dark, the table covered with papers, the walls rich with pictures, a cabinet full of shells, with a dead fern or two", and its view over the garden and paddock beyond. "Mr. Ruskin was very kind, and showed us numbers of manuscripts, which I admired more than I had any idea of, and sketches. . . ." Mr. Ruskin also issued a generous invitation to call whenever she liked on the chance of finding him at home: "or, if I would send a line the day before, he would try and be at home. And now, M., do you, or do you not wish to hear what I think of it; that *that* which is asked for is given; that, well used, this friendship so happily begun, may be a long and growing one: that I have seen a world of beauty, and that this might be the opening to a more glorious path; and that I would give years, if I could bring to Ruskin 'the peace which passes all understanding'."<sup>1</sup>

It was not until a year later, however, when the Guild foundered, that she asked him if she had any chance of making her living by art. Ruskin, who was beginning to know too well the difficulties and danger of art as a career for young ladies, and already found most of his girl protégées "very sufficiently troublesome", was non-committal. But when it was possible, he offered her practical help, by commissioning her to make copies of pictures that he needed for the illustration of his works. With the allowance that he made her, and the meagre £25 she was shortly to earn as secretary to the Working Women's College which, at this time, was also being established by Maurice, she was able to devote herself entirely to the art and social service which together she felt should occupy her life.

"Of all ways of working I think Ruskin's alone is right," she wrote a friend at this time. "He does not say or think of paying you for work done. He says: 'You have power, you must be given the means to use it; don't trouble yourself any more about how you are to live. I have been given means. take some of them, live, set your mind at ease. But don't think I am doing you a personal favour, or a favour at all. I am but carrying on the work I was sent to do. I work for other generations. I work a great deal by educating other workers; for personal, selfish gratification I might derive more by spending my money in buying Turners, but I did not come into the world for that.'"<sup>2</sup> The joy she felt in her visits to him was very keen. "I have been . . . to Mr. Ruskin's for the third time," she wrote a friend the following August. "But still it is a very wonderful event for me; and, I think, always will be; for not only is everything which he says precious—all opening new fields of thought and lighting them,—but also his house is full of the most wonderful pictures that I ever dreamed of. Not fifty Royal Academies could be worth one rough sketch in that house; and he is so inexpressibly kind, so earnest to help everyone, and so generous that one comes home inclined to

<sup>1</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, pp. 36-8.

<sup>2</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, p. 121.

say to everything, 'Hush while I think about it;' and then continue, 'Whirl on! for I have a quietness, which has another Source than you, and which is given to influence you.'"<sup>1</sup>

Soon afterwards, a very pleasant friendship was established between them. Ruskin would talk to Octavia by the hour, telling "of things so subtle I should have despaired of the possibility of anyone being able to convey the thoughts, or even awaken them when they existed in another's mind." Ruskin went to Octavia's house—that home where she had herself chosen all the furnishings and laid the carpets—and talked of Turner or Carlyle. "Only think of the glorious delight of listening to such words that are no longer words but thoughts. So slight, so strong, so full of sympathy, and yet so lonely, so full of joy, and yet so touched with sadness, so beautifully kind."<sup>2</sup> Ruskin now addressed her as "My dear Octavia" and Octavia "rejoiced very much in the words themselves. "If you could realise what your books have been to me, with what childlike reverent spirit I have always listened to your words, you would perhaps let me also sign myself Yours affectionately," she replied soon afterwards.<sup>3</sup> To Ruskin she now poured out all her most cherished dreams. "I have a distinct vision of an attic I hope to possess, when I have time and money to procure and use one little spot for quiet. My St. Michael would be on its walls, and inscriptions, and I should like to preserve a record of some of the numberless messages natural things have recalled to me. Oh, the colours of that attic! I long to paint our houses and churches. I think to arrange beautiful colours, to show what I believe God's works are the symbols of, and to tell a little about the good and the suffering I have seen, these are the only desires I have about it all. I care immensely, almost exclusively, about decorative art. My room, my home, my college, my church are my dreams when I dream. I have puzzled people because I have set myself so resolutely to become a painter, and yet have cared for people so very much. If I did *not* care for them, would not all that is not selfish in my artistic plans be lost?"<sup>4</sup> And so on, in several pages of eager explanation, in which ideas upon art, philanthropy and religion were blended in strange tumult.

Ruskin, touched and perhaps flattered by all this, nevertheless remained sternly practical upon her behalf. "Take the offer, or any other which enables you to make your way in the world and be of use," he advised her when she consulted him about accepting other work. "As soon as you can do without help from me in money (help in all other ways I shall always be ready and happy when I can give) you can tell me; but meantime get on in calmness of mind, laying by

<sup>1</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>2</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 127.

anything you can save; and as long as you need work I can always find you what will be useful to me, so don't worry yourself."<sup>1</sup>

But despite her ardour, Ruskin kept Octavia sternly to copying: and even when he gravely acknowledged her help in the later volumes of *Modern Painters*, she still did not know whether or not he considered that she had talent.

"Ruskin's volume is out, and I have seen it for a moment or two, just seen four of my own scraps in it, and a word or two in the preface about me, which delighted me," she wrote to a friend on 1 July, 1860. "It implies no praise whatever of power or skill, but just says that my help had been, what I hope nearly everyone's is, 'disinterested'. It is a great pleasure to me that he should have thought of mentioning me, and I am perfectly satisfied with what he says. The kind of work is worth very little, and one knows it is tolerably well done, or he would not have said so to me, or used it; but I know no more of what he thinks about my work than I did before."<sup>2</sup>

It was perhaps some doubts as to her abilities in this sphere that led Ruskin presently to help her establish her school in Nottingham Place; and, later, to finance the first scheme for practical slum-improvement in which she had so admirable a medium for exercising her real gifts.

Nevertheless, disappointed in her hopes of becoming an artist rather than an art teacher as she may have been, Octavia Hill still felt for her master the same admiration and affection. "Ruskin is coming to us on Wednesday . . ." she wrote to a friend in the spring of 1862. "There is something almost solemn in the intense joy. . . . I can remember when he came to us when we were so very very poor, and home was like a little raft in a dark storm; where the wonder every day was whether we could live through it. . . . I remember too how once Ruskin's coming was like some strange joy; any little accident might have removed him for ever from all connection with us. Now the silent work of years has bound us together in a sort of friendship, which, whether it leads to outward communication or not, years, and separation, and silences will not touch; and this visit comes like the expression of a friendship, naturally, and like a bit of a whole. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

## 4

Foremost among new friendships of this period was that of Charles Eliot Norton which was to become, for Ruskin, one of the most valued relationships of his life. Charles Eliot Norton, an American from Massachusetts, belonging to a family as cultured and as civilised as that which produced his great contemporary, Henry James, who

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 133-4.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 199.

was later to edit, with Lowell, the *North American Review*, to hold a chair for the History of Art at Harvard, to translate the works of Dante, and to edit the American editions of the works of Ruskin and Carlyle, having come to see the Turners at Denmark Hill with a letter of introduction from a mutual friend, had met Ruskin and his parents shortly afterwards while they were on the boat from Vevey to Geneva, and gracefully asked permission to introduce to them his mother and sisters. Young in years, unaffected in manner, courteous in address, and unusually well informed and intelligent in conversation, Charles Eliot Norton, with his expressive eyes and his melodious voice, soon won the confidence and affection of all the Ruskin family. ". . . A man of the highest natural gifts, in their kind," Ruskin wrote of him later. "Observant and critical rather than imaginative, but with an all-pervading sympathy and sensibility, absolutely free from envy, ambition, or covetousness: a scholar from his cradle, nor only now a man of the world, but a gentleman of the world, whom the highest born and best bred of every nation, from the Red Indian to the White Austrian, would recognise in a moment, as of their caste.

"In every branch of classical literature he was my superior; knew old English writers better than I—much more, old French; and had active fellowship and close friendship with the then really progressive leaders of thought in his own country, Longfellow, Lowell and Emerson.

"All the sympathy, and all the critical subtlety, of his mind had been given, not only to the reading, but to the trial and following out of the whole theory of *Modern Painters*. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Norton, on his side, wrote later of this meeting: "His abundant light brown hair, his blue eyes, and his fresh complexion gave him a young look for his age; he was a little above middle height, his figure was slight, his movements were quick and alert, and his whole air and manner had a definite and attractive individuality. There was nothing in him of the common English reserve and stiffness, and no self-consciousness or sign of consideration of himself as a man of distinction, but rather, on the contrary, a seeming self-forgetfulness and an almost feminine sensitiveness and readiness of sympathy. His features were irregular, but the lack of beauty in his countenance was made up for by the kindness of his look, and the expressiveness of his full and mobile lips. The tone of dogmatism and of arbitrary assertion too often manifest in his writing was entirely absent from his talk. . . . He never quarrelled with a difference of opinion, and was apt to attribute only too much value to a judgment that did not coincide with his own. I have not a memory of these days in which I recall him except as one of the pleasantest, gentlest, kindest, and most interesting of men."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 521.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, op. cit., vol. i, p. 5.

Ruskin and Norton saw much of each other at Oxford, when Norton visited England; and though their friendship was largely epistolary, they met each other on various occasions both in England and in Italy.

Even more significant than his friendship with Norton at this time was Ruskin's friendship with his "second earthly Master", Thomas Carlyle. Ruskin had now been reading Carlyle with devotion since *Past and Present* had been recommended to him in 1843 by George Richmond. And although Ruskin had met Carlyle in 1850 during the period of his married life, it was not until 1855 that he became a frequent visitor at the evening tea-parties at the famous house in Cheyne Row, where for many years he was a devoted disciple at the prophet's feet. Of that dyspeptic genius of whom his wife used to say complacently: "If Mr. Carlyle's digestion had been stronger, there is no saying what he might have been,"<sup>1</sup> Holman Hunt has left a very vivid picture. "On the first visit I need only say that he looked taller and younger than when muffled up outside, and that his face, despite a shade of ricketty joylessness, was one of the noblest I had ever seen. His large orbited blue eyes, deep sunk, had upper lids drooping over the iris, the lower lid occasionally leaving bare the white below. The brow was prominent, the cranium domed and large, the hair shaggy. His nose and the lower part of his face had the stamp of grandeur, and his figure, when unbent, had a dignity of its own. Weakness revealed itself in the meagreness of his neck, and want of robust development in a slight twist of the spine. These cripplings were also accompanied by a voice which reached the treble when he wished to discourage interruption at the melancholy tone of his philosophy. Following his talk was like listening to the pages of one of his own books. He would have no dialogue, but the tenderness of the man bespoke itself in its unaffectedness of gesture and the directness of his first word. Like all great men I have ever seen, he indulged in no pomposity. He assumed, not unnaturally however, that people—young people particularly—wanted to hear him talk, and did not expect him to listen, and when the intention was made clear I was more than content."<sup>2</sup> And while Carlyle held his audience spellbound by the impassioned eloquence in broad Scots as uncheckable as the flowing of a mighty river—to which, when Lady Waterford heard it once at Lord Ashburton's, "she sat listening as if she had been at a play"—his wife would place herself behind him, emphasise his salient points with exhibitionary smiles and nods of approval, and hold up an admonitory finger whenever it seemed that one of his audience intended a reply.

Mrs. Carlyle, indeed, although one of the most famous wives of her day, never left anyone in ignorance of the fact that she had been a

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. H. Coghill, *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Oliphant* (1899), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 1, p. 353.



noted beauty and an heiress in her youth, and that she had married her husband in the face of much family opposition. And if Ruskin was sometimes heard to refer to her as "the shrew", he was far from being the only one to comment on the bitter tongue that she herself has acknowledged using, on the occasion when he accompanied them to a great soirée at Bath House, "not wisely, but too well".<sup>1</sup> Carlyle, on his side, of whom Ruskin wittily said to Froude that he had been "born in the clouds and struck by the lightning",<sup>2</sup> found Ruskin—as he wrote to his brother on 27 November, 1855—"a bottle of beautiful soda water . . . very pleasant company now and then. . . . A singular element, very curious to look upon—in the present puddle of the intellectual artistic so-called 'world' in these parts at this date."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the prophet of Chelsea was gratified to see so many of his own ideas assimilated into the body of his young friend's ideas: but although Ruskin was much influenced by Carlyle, the sympathy between them was based rather upon an essential similarity of attitude, and Ruskin never feared to make it clear to his friend that often he had arrived at similar conclusions although travelling by a different route.

With the Brownings Ruskin had been acquainted for many years, through the good offices of Miss Mitford. "How graphically you give us your Oxford Student," Mrs. Browning had written to her friend on 10 October, 1848, after receiving a long letter in his praise. "The picture is more distinct than Turner's, and if you had called it, in the manner of the Master, 'A Rock Limpet', we should have recognised in it the corresponding type of the gifted and eccentric writer in question. Very eloquent he is, I agree at once, and true views he takes of art in the abstract, true and elevating. It is in the application of connective logic that he breaks away from me so violently."<sup>4</sup>

With Ruskin's generous sensibilities and catholic tastes, it was inevitable that he should sympathise deeply with the woman who was to cry out with such integrity and passion against political injustice and social wrong, the woman who was to write *The Cry of the Children* and *Casa Guidi Windows*, and whom later he called "the only entirely perfect example of womanhood he knew".<sup>5</sup> And when Ruskin called upon Mrs. Browning during her visit to England in 1852, this innate sympathy had soon been established beyond doubt. Already, as she was to tell him later, she had "picked up and worn for a crown"<sup>6</sup> the reference to the "spirituality of Elizabeth Barrett"<sup>7</sup> which he had made in the first volume of *The Stones of Venice*, and now, going with her husband to Denmark Hill to lunch with the

<sup>1</sup> W. Carlyle, *New Letters and Memoirs of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, vol. 2, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 36, p. xciv.

<sup>3</sup> A. Carlyle, *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 2, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. F. G. Kenyon (1897), vol. 1, p. 384.

<sup>5</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters of E. B. Browning*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> *Works*, vol. 9, p. 228.

Ruskins and see the Turners, "which are divine", she wrote to Miss Mitford that she "liked Mr. Ruskin much, and so did Robert. Very gentle, yet earnest—refined and truthful," she found him. "We count him among the valuable acquaintances made this year in England."<sup>1</sup> Nearly two years later, in June 1854, when Miss Mitford passed on to her something that she had heard Ruskin say in her praise, she returned: "The words you sent me from Mr. Ruskin gave me great pleasure indeed, as how should they not from such a man? I like him personally, too, beside my admiration for him as a writer, and I was deeply gratified in every way to have his approbation."<sup>2</sup>

It was Rossetti who had just kindled Ruskin's admiration for Robert Browning, by staying very late one night at Denmark Hill and reading to him aloud some of Browning's poems in his rich, melodious voice. "Ruskin," Rossetti wrote to Allingham soon after, "on reading *Men and Women* (and with it some of the other works which he didn't know before) declared them rebelliously to be a mass of conundrums, and compelled me to sit down before him and lay siege for one whole night; the result of which was that he sent me next morning a bulky letter to be forwarded to B., in which I trust he told him he was the greatest man since Shakespeare."<sup>3</sup> At this enthusiastic praise—"a dear, too dear and good letter",<sup>4</sup> Browning called it to Rossetti—tempered with qualms at his obscurity, Browning sent him *Men and Women*. Soon Browning was defending himself vigorously from Ruskin's charges of obscurity, just as Mrs. Browning was to defend herself vigorously from the charge of a too idiosyncratic use of rhyme and language. "I cannot begin writing poetry till my imaginary reader has conceded licences to me which you demur at altogether. I *know* that I don't make out my conception by my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be: but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which succeed if they bear the conception from me to you. You might, I think, try to keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge of my glaciers, as you call them; not stand poking your alpenstock into the holes, and demonstrating that no foot could have stood there,—suppose it sprang over there."<sup>5</sup>

"I am going to bind your poems in a golden binding, and give them to my class of working men as the purest poetry in our language," Ruskin wrote to Mrs. Browning in the spring of 1855. ". . . Only, pray, in the next edition, alter the first verse of the *Drama of Exile—Gehenna*—and when a—and I must try to coax you to send some of the long, compounded Greek words—which I, for one, can't under-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of E. B. Browning*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham*, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters from Robert Browning to Various Correspondents*, ed. T. J. Wise, vol. 1, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, p. 163.

stand a syllable of—about their Greek business.”<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later, he was tempering further praise with good-humoured critical complaints. “For instance, the ‘nympholeptic’ in the *Lost Bower*. I don’t, myself, know what it means, and I haven’t had time to look in the dictionary for it; and what is still worse, I don’t expect to find it when I *do* look.” “When you have succeeded in all your designs upon the English language,” he added, “I might perhaps most graphically describe it as

‘Tesseric, pentic, hectic, hiptic,  
Maeno-daemonic, and dyspeptic,  
Hippid-ic, Pippid-ic, East-wind-nipped-ic,  
Stiffened like styptic, doubled in diptych,  
Possi-kephaly-cheresecliptic—’

the last line, by the bye, is really a triumph of expression.”<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Browning took all this equally without resentment and without humour. . . . “I said that any remark of yours was to be received by me in all reverence,” she replied gravely; “and truth is a part of reverence, so I shall end by telling you the truth that I think you are quite wrong in your objection to nympholept. . . . It’s a word for a specific disease or mania among the ancients, that mystical passion for an invisible nymph common to a certain class of visionaries. Indeed, I am not the first in referring to it in English literature. De Quincey has done so in prose, for instance, and Lord Byron talks of ‘the nympholepsy of a fond despair’—though *he* was never accused of being overridden by his Greek. Tell me if I am not justified, I also? We are all nympholepts in running after our ideals—and none more than yourself, indeed.”<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, during their rare and difficult visits to England, the Brownings and Ruskin met. In 1855 they all spent an evening together, and Mrs. Browning considered Ruskin “gracious and generous”,<sup>4</sup> and found all her good impressions of him strengthened. While a few days later, Browning took their young friend, Frederic Leighton, to Denmark Hill, who was “as kindly received”.<sup>5</sup>

On another famous occasion Ruskin met Browning, at Patmore’s, when Tennyson was also of the company. That little house at The Grove, Highgate Rise, had by now become as famous for the number of poets that foregathered there, as had been Rogers’ mansion in St. James’ a few decades before. The charming, witty and intelligent Augusta Emily—by now famous—the *Angel in the House* whose husband noted of her with such gratification that at a party given by Bryan Waller Procter, “Alfred Tennyson scarcely spoke to anyone but

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 4.3.1855: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 191–2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 6.4.1855: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 196–7.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of E. B. Browning*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

her, to the apparent envy and surprise of certain great ladies, who evidently thought that so splendid a beauty with so milkmaid-like an absence of pretensions was contrary to the usages",<sup>1</sup> presided over these gatherings with a tact which allowed the conversation the freest play. Late in the evening, when the little party was at its height, Sidney Dobell, who, in 1850, had published *The Roman* under "the beastliest pseudonym ever invented—Sidney Yendis (remarkable for an abundance of every perfection except the one we want in a poet—individuality and unprecedentedness)", as Patmore confided to Allingham, joined the company, and "began talking cleverly and very predominantly, laying down the law about many things".<sup>2</sup> Presently he heard Mrs. Patmore address Ruskin by name. "Is that *the* Mr. Ruskin?" he asked in a whisper: and when he learned that it was, his conversation became a good deal more restrained. Later he heard Mrs. Patmore address Browning by name. "Is that *the* Mr. Browning?" he enquired, in another whispered aside: and upon hearing that it was, his conversation became monosyllabic. Finally he heard someone address Tennyson by name. "Is that *the* Mr. Tennyson?" he whispered again, in tones even more awesome than before. "Yes," Mrs. Patmore simply replied: and thereafter Mr. Dobell spoke no more.<sup>3</sup>

The meetings of 1855 undoubtedly gave Mrs. Browning several significant clues as to Ruskin's essential nature. "As for Mr. Ruskin, he sees often in his own light—that's what I see and feel,"<sup>4</sup> she told him in a letter written that autumn from Italy; and three weeks later: "You don't mistake by your heart, through loving, but you exaggerate by your imagination, through glorying. That's my thought, at least. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

The following year, when Mrs. Browning published *Aurora Leigh*, Ruskin was wildly enthusiastic. He declared it to be "the greatest poem in the language, unsurpassed by anything but Shakespeare—not surpassed by Shakespeare's *sonnets*, and therefore the greatest poem in the language. . . . I write this, you see," he declared, "very deliberately, straight, or nearly so; which is not so common with me, for I am taking pains that you may not think (nor anybody else) that I am writing in a state of excitement, though there is enough in the poem to put me into such a state."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, he could not find the word phalanstery in Dr. Johnson's Dictionary, and did not know what it meant. Dynastick hurt him like a stick, and one or two passages on the art discussions he could not make out. Otherwise, he had nothing but praise, and his deep sympathy for Mrs. Browning was

<sup>1</sup> Champneys, *Coventry Patmore*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 130 n.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of 27.11.1856: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 247.

confirmed anew. In fact, one evening a few weeks later, when he happened to be sitting next to Lady Anne Milbanke at a dinner party, forgetting for the moment that she was the grand-daughter of Lord Byron, he unabashedly came out with the fact that he considered *Aurora Leigh* the greatest poem in the language.

With Tennyson Ruskin was more slightly acquainted. His admiration for him was very great, however, and he once admitted that no description he had ever given of anything was worth four lines of Tennyson. Thus when Woolner told Ruskin one day that "the royal Alfred" would like to see his Turners, Ruskin wrote at once begging him to fix a day for his visit, so that he could "keep it wholly for him, and prepare his Turners to look their rosiest and best".<sup>1</sup> There were meetings, too, at Little Holland House.

By the end of the 'fifties, Little Holland House had achieved a position as unique in its period as Holland House had held a decade or so before. But two miles from Hyde Park Corner, it possessed all the amenities of an old country house. From the rambling passages and ancient rooms, some of them painted with full-sized figures by Watts, you looked out upon a field where once Cromwell and Ireton had walked together; and the spacious grounds included a paddock and a farm. The owner, Henry Thoby Prinsep of the East India Company, was a distinguished Indian official, "a large grand-looking man (William Rossetti called him), but so good-natured in tone and manner that one almost lost sight of his stateliness".<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Prinsep, one of a large family of beautiful sisters that included Lady Dalrymple, Lady Somers, and Mrs. Cameron, the famous amateur photographer, was a handsome and charming hostess whose greatest pleasure was to see her low-ceilinged, dimly lighted, exquisitely furnished rooms, and her spacious and well kept garden filled with distinguished visitors. Between 1855 and 1870, the Sunday afternoons at Little Holland House, where there gathered the most distinguished artists (including Watts, who had come to stay for a few days, and remained for thirty years), poets, writers, actresses and beauties of the day, besides famous generals, politicians, diplomats and merchant princes, achieved all the charm and the *réclame* that the parties of Madeleine Lemaire were to do in Paris a few decades later.

Tea tables would be spread beneath the magnificent elms; dishes piled high with strawberries encrimsoned the snowy tablecloths; while here a group would be playing croquet, or bowls, and there some young artists would have set up their easels to paint the beautiful Miss Herbert who had been prevailed upon to sit to them. Here Joachim and Hallé played, here Ristori recited; here the retiring Christina Rossetti met Watts and the "gigantic Val"; and here Edward Burne-Jones was invited with the usual generosity of the

<sup>1</sup> *Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, by his Son (1897), vol. 1, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 203.

hosts, to convalesce from an illness during his first days in London. In his naive, expressive way, he would describe his first visit to Lady Horner years later: "One day Gabriel took me out in a cab—it was a day he was rich, so we went in a hansom, and we drove and drove until I thought we should arrive at the setting sun, and he said, 'You must know these people, Ned. They are remarkable people: you will see a painter there, he paints pictures about God and Creation.' . . . So it was he took me to Little Holland House. It was a very strange society, foreign in its ease and brilliancy. Often there would be dinner laid for thirty or forty people—much feasting and noise and clatter of tongues and dishes, and a certain free grand hospitality, and about the lawn people walking, and talking, and enjoying themselves without effort or constraint in a way that happened nowhere else in England. Thackeray, and Browning, and Tennyson were there, and tall beautiful women amongst them, and that happened there every week."<sup>1</sup>

Here it was that Ruskin, one day when Jones was showing some of his sketches, suddenly cried out in his generous, enthusiastic way—"Jones, you're gigantic!"<sup>2</sup> a remark which gave inexpressible amusement to Tennyson, who happened to be standing near, so that "Gigantic Jones" thereafter became the young painter's nickname for many a day.

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 182.

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## Chapter III

1. *The Oxford Museum: Ruskin's participation: the brothers O'Shea: Ruskin's disappointment.* 2. *Edward Jones seeks out Rossetti: meets Ruskin: the painting of the Oxford Union: Jane Burdon: "the greatest fiasco".* 3. *Compromise over Turner's will: Ruskin seeks permission to arrange Turner collection for the National Gallery: makes catalogue: provides cabinets and frames.* 4. *"Academy Notes": their influence: Ruskin the critic: resentment amongst painters: he explains his method to Leighton.* 5. *"The Political Economy of Art" and "The Two Paths".*

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1

"W E, THE undersigned, being officially connected with various institutions for the advancement of natural knowledge in this University, are of the opinion that the several collections contained in the Clarendon, the Ashmolean Museum, the Anatomical Museum in Christ Church, are deposited in rooms of inadequate dimensions and inconvenient arrangement, and that their present efficiency and future progress are by these means retarded."<sup>1</sup> Such was the statement, signed by P. B. Duncan, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum; Robert Walker, Reader in Experimental Philosophy; and Henry Wentworth Acland, Lee Reader in Anatomy, which, although ignored at the time of its issue, was ultimately to establish in Oxford a home for the natural sciences.

A year later, in 1848, Acland published a privately printed pamphlet entitled *Some Remarks on the Extension of Education at the University of Oxford*, in which he urged the duty of Convocation's introducing certain branches of natural science into the curriculum necessary for all taking the Bachelor of Arts degree, and a reconsideration of "our responsibilities and prospects as a University having the privilege of granting degrees in medicine and giving licence to practise".<sup>2</sup> Since this appeared to have no effect, in 1849 a new attempt was made to interest the authorities in the erection of a building to supply laboratories for subjects connected with natural science; an appeal was circulated for friends, and resolutions were passed in the Sheldonian Theatre for the building of a museum to fulfil such needs.

For nearly four years the matter dragged on. At last, in January, 1854, the building of a new museum was sanctioned, and a commission was appointed "to consider the question of erecting a museum". In April, a second commission was formed to obtain designs and estimates from architects for a suitable building not to exceed £30,000 in

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, Bart.: A Memoir* (1903), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

cost; to examine and choose from amongst these, and to report upon them to the House. Thirty-two designs were submitted, and exhibited publicly on screens in the gallery of the Radcliffe Camera. Six of them were presently selected for consideration; and the final choice reduced to two. One of these, in the Palladian style, bore the motto: *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*; the other, described as "Rhenish", in Gothic which one of its partisans called "Veronese of the best and manliest type in a new and striking combination"<sup>1</sup>—*Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum*. Both were reported as being suitable for the required purpose, and it was merely a question which style was to be preferred. Though many of the university were for voting against both, on the old grounds that "scientific studies were not extensively pursued", or that the teaching of science "falsely so called"<sup>2</sup> might have a disastrous effect upon the literal interpretation of the Pentateuch, for some weeks excitement filled the air. Fortunately, those two redoubtable Churchmen, Marriot and Pusey, were in favour of the Museum, and their influence finally overrode the adverse Theological Party. But the question of style still remained undecided. Pamphlets in favour of each were distributed in large numbers. On 9 December Acland held a reception at the Radcliffe for those interested to view the plans, and made an unofficial statement about them. By now Henry Acland had become a man of influence in the university. Not only did he possess the largest practice in the county, but he also held the positions of Physician to the Radcliffe Infirmary, Radcliffe Librarian, Regius Professor of Medicine, besides being consulting physician to a royal prince. Fervently in favour of the Gothic design, on the very eve of the poll he issued a pamphlet of his own. So keen was the competition that when Convocation passed the motion for the Museum, the Gothic won by only two votes.

The architects of the selected design were Deane, Woodward and Deane, an Irish firm that were already building the new library at Trinity College, Dublin, in Byzantine Renaissance.

"Yesterday in Dublin I saw, but hastily, the part finished building in Trinity College," William Allingham wrote to William Rossetti on 25 May, 1855, "which is after Ruskin's heart. . . . Ruskin has written to the architect, a young man, expressing high approval of the plans, so bye and bye all you cognoscenti will be rushing over to examine the Stones of Dublin."<sup>3</sup> This was the building which Ruskin, when lecturing in Dublin ten years later, was to call "the first realisation he had the joy to see of the principles he had, until then, been endeavouring to teach, but which, alas, was now to him no more than the richly canopied monument of one of his most loving friends, Benjamin Woodward".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to W. Allingham*, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> *Sesame and Lilies: Works*, vol. 18, pp. 149-50.



On 20 June, 1855, the foundation stone of the new monument was laid by the Earl of Derby. Ruskin had been intensely interested in the project of the Oxford Museum ever since it had become a realisable dream. Now, as soon as he heard the good news, he wrote to Acland: "I have just received your telegraphic message from Woodward, and am going to thank God for it and lie down to sleep. It means much, I think, both to you and me. I trust you will have no anxiety, such as you have borne, to bear again in this cause. The Museum in your hands, as it must eventually be, will be the root of as much good to others as I suppose it is natural for any living soul to hope to do in its earth-time."<sup>1</sup> Although he had never considered the winning design first-rate, though "as good as is likely to be got in these days",<sup>2</sup> now that it had been chosen he was full of characteristic enthusiasm for the details. "I hope to be able to get Millais and Rossetti to design flower and beast borders," he told his friend—"crocodile and various vermin—such as you are particularly fond of—Mrs. Buckland's 'dabby things'—and we will carve them and inlay them with Cornish serpentine all about your windows. I will pay for a good deal myself, and I doubt not to find funds. *Such* capitals we will have."<sup>3</sup>

Acland had wanted to get Ruskin to Oxford ever since he himself had been installed there. It was one of the first entries he had made in his diary upon arrival: and if he still thought Ruskin "curious", none of his contemporaries could have appreciated more clearly the fundamental value of his work. "The whole nature of Ruskin," he wrote later in his preface to a reprint of the *Oxford Museum*, "resists the limited study of Nature which takes a part for the whole, which studies the material structure of Man, forgetting the higher aspiration and properties for which that structure seems to exist on earth—to bring him into communion with the Infinite—and through the Infinite to the love of all things living with Man or for him."<sup>4</sup> And now he not only enlisted his aid, but persuaded him to stay at Oxford much of the time that the work was in progress.

Ruskin entered into the spirit of the building with characteristic zeal. He subscribed generously to the public fund for the decoration of the building (since the sum voted by Convocation was sufficient only for the shell) and persuaded many of his wealthy friends to do likewise: he wrote two letters for the little book which Acland prepared in 1859 to explain the purpose of the Museum and enlist public support: he urged his father to give the funds for the erection of a statue of Hippocrates: he gave a further £300 to decorate a set of windows: and he combined with Rossetti to persuade Woolner and

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 12.12.1854: *Works*, vol. 16, p. xliii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 16, p. xliii.

<sup>3</sup> Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland*, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, vol. 16, p. 239.

Munro to sculpt figures for a specially reduced fee. "Among the features of the Interior Decoration are a goodish number of statues of celebrated men," Rossetti wrote to John Tupper on Easter Sunday, 1856. "Woolner is to do Bacon, Munro is doing Galileo . . . I am not quite certain about the price at which Woolner and Munro have consented to do these figures . . . but I believe it is about £70 each."<sup>1</sup> Munro, in fact, executed four statues, the price of which was donated by Queen Victoria.

Then Ruskin threw himself whole-heartedly into more practical matters. He lectured to the workmen whom Woodward had imported specially from Ireland, upon the scope for originality and the interest which the workman should have in his work; he made a great many designs for windows, one of which was used: he designed six iron brackets for the roof: and he no doubt administered a quantity of good advice.

But Ruskin was never the man to advise where he could not perform, and when he came down to Oxford for some weeks during the long vacation of 1857, he took lodgings outside the town, and, walking in to dine with Acland every day, sought lessons in bricklaying from the workmen who were building a new study on to Acland's house. At first he complained that his tutor the bricklayer most provokingly pulled down his finest bits of work; but finally his efforts were allowed to stand. Rumour has it that Ruskin built with his own hands one of the brick columns of the Museum itself, and that Acland used to show it to visitors with solemn pride. But rumour also has it that the column had to be rebuilt later by a more professional hand, and no one had the heart to tell Acland of the deception.

Carpentering, wall painting and plastering, Ruskin tried them all; and later wrote that he could take an even shaving six feet long off a board with the best of them, and had experienced all the master's superiority in the use of a blunt brush. With the trowel, however, he was less successful, and as it seemed that success could be won only at the expense of his entire literary and political career, he presently gave it up. A certain amiable light-heartedness seems to have pervaded the entire work; and the men grew to enjoy carving original capitals so much that Woodward eventually assured Ruskin that individual capitals were no more expensive to produce than the usual uniform ones. Two of the workmen, indeed, the now famous brothers O'Shea, pushed their talents to the point of causing a scandal. Handsome, red-bearded, high-spirited and intrepid, they arrived at work every morning bearing plants from the Botanical Gardens, which they proceeded to copy upon the capitals of the pillars; until, having exhausted their ingenuity with leaves and flowers, they turned their attention to animals and insects.

When the Master of the University saw one of the O'Shea brothers

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 132.

carving a monkey he was apparently not amused, and accused the man of destroying the property of the Museum. After a heated argument, O'Shea was dismissed: but not before he had wittily recorded his righteous indignation. "O'Shea, I thought you were gone," said Acland, coming upon him unexpectedly at the top of a ladder savagely hammering at the porch. "What are you doing?" "Parrhots and owls!" said the irrepressible O'Shea. "Members of Convocation."<sup>1</sup> And great was his indignation when Acland commanded him to knock their heads off.

Unsatisfactory in the first place, the complete design of the Oxford Museum was never carried out; and what was built was further spoiled by lack of funds. Woodward had intended a recessed and richly carved porch; and Woolner had even designed one, with niches for statues, some of which Ruskin had designed. But the money was not forthcoming, and the interior work was left so incomplete that of four hundred capitals and bases, only one hundred were carved. Years later Ruskin admitted that the whole thing had been a grievous disappointment. He had never suggested that "a handsome building could be built of common brick-bats" or that "you could secure a great national monument of art by letting loose the first lively Irishmen you could get hold of".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, he had made the position clear enough in his second letter to Acland on the subject, published later in *The Oxford Museum*. "Do you suppose Gothic decoration is an easy thing," he wrote, "or that it is to be carried out with a certainty of success at the first trial, under new and difficult conditions? The system of the Gothic decorations took eight hundred years to mature, gathering its power by undivided inheritance of traditional method, and unbroken accession of systematic power; from its culminating point in the Sainte Chapelle, it faded through four hundred years of splendid decline; now for two centuries it has laid dead—and more than so—buried; and more than so, forgotten, as a dead man out of mind; do you expect to revive it out of those retorts and furnaces of yours, as the cloud spirit of the Arabian sea rose from beneath the seals of Solomon? Perhaps I have been myself faultfully answerable for this too eager hope in your mind (as well as in that of others) by what I have urged so often respecting the duty of bringing out the power of subordinate workmen in decorative design. But do you think I meant workmen trained (or untrained) in the way that ours have been until lately, and then cast loose on a sudden, into unassisted contentions with unknown elements of style? I meant the precise contrary of this: I meant workmen as we have yet to create them: men inheriting the instincts of their craft through generations, rigidly trained in every mechanical art that bears on their materials, and familiarized

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 16, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 22, p. 325.

from infancy with every condition of their beautiful and perfect treatment; informed and refined in manhood, by constant observation of all natural fact and form; then classed, according to their proved capacities, in ordered companies, in which every man shall know his part, and take it calmly and without effort or doubt—indisputably well,—unaccusably accomplished—mailed and weaponed cap-a-pie for his place and function. Can you lay hands on such men? or do you think that mere natural goodwill and good feeling can at once supply their place? Not so—and the more faithful and earnest the minds you have to deal with, the more careful you should be not to urge them towards fields of effort in which, too early committed, they can only be put to unserviceable defeat.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2

One day, in the same year that Oxford was agitated with the question of what style should be chosen for its new Museum, an excited young undergraduate named William Morris rushed into the rooms of his friend Ned Jones, tenderly carrying Ruskin's *Edinburgh Lectures*, which he immediately opened and began to read aloud in his peculiarly chanting, sonorous voice. Thus, the pale and dreamy-eyed Edward Jones first heard about the Pre-Raphaelites: and thus he first heard the name of Rossetti. For weeks afterwards, the two young men could talk of nothing else but paintings they had never seen. As he became slowly acquainted with some of Rossetti's work, so there was born in Edward Jones the secret determination to look for himself upon the man who bore that magic name: not to know him—such a thought would have been too audacious—but merely to look upon his face, and admire, and marvel from a distance. So one day, nearly two years later, hearing that Rossetti taught drawing at the Working Men's College, Jones presented himself at the College with the single purpose of looking upon Rossetti's face. He had chosen an unfortunate evening for his pilgrimage. A monthly meeting was about to be held: Rossetti was not there: and the forlorn young visitor presently found himself seated at a long table furnished with plates of thick bread and butter. Presently Furnivall, who happened to be seated opposite, took pity upon him, and when his friendly questions had elicited the stranger's name, and his college, and his reason for coming, he introduced him to a kindly looking young man named Vernon Lushington. An hour later Rossetti appeared: and though it is a perilous thing for any man to meet in the flesh a figure that he has already placed upon a pedestal, when at last Edward Jones saw his idol, he felt he had not come in vain.

He had no opportunity of speaking to Rossetti that night, nor had he the wish to: but Lushington invited him to his rooms a few even-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.1.1859: *Works*, vol. 16, pp. 223-4.

ings later; and there, once more, was Rossetti, a hero clothed in the splendid vesture of imagination, lording it over the company with his infectious exuberance and his sonorous captivating voice.

Years later, Burne-Jones would try to capture the magic of these early days by pouring out his reminiscences to Lady Horner. "Gabriel was nice and loving, and wanted me every day, and I was amazed as we went abroad that people in Fleet Street let him pass and didn't carry him shoulder high. . . ." <sup>1</sup> How it would all come back to him—the eating house in Cheapside where you could get a sausage, a lump of bread and a glass of beer for fourpence, where Gabriel would lean against the counter reading aloud passages from *Morte d'Arthur* while they ate. It is clear that Rossetti was immediately captivated by Edward Jones. With a deep conviction of his own remarkable genius, for years he had felt himself overshadowed by the spectacular facility of Millais and the scrupulous industry of Holman Hunt. Even Ruskin's appreciation was often barbed. Avid of praise and passionately resentful of criticism as he always had been, and always was to be, Rossetti was immeasurably gratified at so naive and so genuine a homage; and treated Jones with all the affectionate tenderness with which formerly he had treated the handsome Deverell, whom he was never quite certain that Lizzie had not loved.

Once Jones had got to know Rossetti—"the greatest man in Europe", <sup>2</sup> as he was now wont to call him—it was inevitable that his friend William Morris, the rich young undergraduate who had already offered him half his fortune, who financed the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, and had suddenly discovered that "writing poetry was very easy to do", should get to know him too: equally inevitable that the expansive Rossetti should soon introduce his young protégé to Ruskin. Jones had, in fact, written Ruskin a letter of diffident admiration some time before; and, having received a gracious reply, had elatedly written to a friend that he was not E. C. B. Jones any longer, but had dropped his personality altogether. "I am a correspondent with Ruskin, and my future title is the man who wrote to Ruskin and got an answer by return." <sup>3</sup>

In his touching, effusive way, the ardent young undergraduate immediately informed his father of the remarkable event. "Just come back from being with our hero for four hours. So happy we've been: he is so kind to us, calls us his dear boys, and makes us feel like such old, old friends. Tonight he comes down to our rooms to carry off my drawing and show it to lots of people: tomorrow night he comes again, and every Thursday night the same—isn't that like a dream? Think of knowing Ruskin like an equal and being called his dear boys. Oh! he is so good and kind—better than his books, which are the

<sup>1</sup> Francis Horner, *Time Remembered* (1933), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 127.

best books in the world.”<sup>1</sup> So greatly did he value these books, indeed, filled as they were with those noble words that made him “shake and tremble” that when he became engaged it was these—his most cherished possessions—that he laid at the feet of his future wife.

In his later years Burne-Jones saw it still in a golden, dreamlike haze. “*Ruskin took to me in a minute,*” he told Lady Horner, “and told Gabriel to look out, for I should run him hard, and Gabriel said he knew it—I could have sunk on the carpet for shame, and hated it, and felt, and feel it now, dreadful to have said it—so I wrote to Morris at Oxford and said he must come to be a painter for it was such a wonderful world, and only revealed to painters—and always Gabriel was saying, ‘If any man has any poetry in him he should paint it, for it has all been said and written, and they have hardly begun to paint it. Every man who has that gift should paint.’ That’s how we began!”<sup>2</sup> So Morris came; and shortly afterwards Edward Jones was telling another friend: “The other night Rossetti made a magnificent group—Ruskin, himself, Top and me, oh so exact—I screamed with delight.” With similar enthusiasm Burne-Jones reported to his father his first meeting with Holman Hunt. “A glorious day it has been—a glorious day, one to be remembered by the side of the most notable in my life: for whilst I was painting and Topsy was making drawings in Rossetti’s studio, there entered the greatest genius that is on earth alive, William Holman Hunt—such a grand looking fellow, such a splendour of a man, with a great wiry golden beard, and faithful violet eyes—oh, such a man.”<sup>3</sup> Even Rossetti was infected by so much enthusiasm. “Morris and Jones have now been some time settled in London,” he wrote to Allingham in December, “and are both, I find, wonders after their kind.”<sup>4</sup>

One day during the long vacation of 1857, Rossetti, visiting Oxford to see how the Museum was progressing, was taken by Woodward to look at the Union building, a Venetian Gothic structure of red brick with stone dressings that he was also building. Struck with the sight of so much virgin space above the gallery bay windows, Rossetti immediately suggested, in his exuberant, expansive way, to do a mural painting above one window for nothing but the love of it. Infected by this impetuous enthusiasm, William Morris, who was with them and had never, as yet, painted anything in his life, but evidently considered that he would find painting, like the writing of poetry, very easy, at once offered to do another: and Woodward, much excited by the idea, gave his tentative consent.

From this simple suggestion the idea rapidly grew; and presently Rossetti envisaged himself as the master of a school in the true

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 145.

mediaeval manner, lording it over a group of enthusiastic disciples in classic style. Nothing would satisfy him now but the decoration of the whole of the blank space with a series of paintings by different men, which should all illustrate various aspects of a single theme. In hot haste he rushed out to Little Holland House in order to persuade the young Val Prinsep to participate in the scheme. Prinsep, who had studied under Watts, and was only too well aware of his own deficiencies as a draughtsman, though flattered by the invitation, pointed out that he had absolutely no experience of such work. "It doesn't matter," Rossetti told him. "There's a man I know who has never painted anything—his name is Morris—he has undertaken one of the panels and he will do something very good, you may depend. So you had better come."<sup>1</sup>

Rossetti being, when he wished to get his own way in such matters, quite irresistible, Prinsep very soon agreed; and before long Ned Jones, Arthur Hughes, John Pollen (who had decorated the ceiling of Merton College), R. S. Stanhope and Alexander Munro were all impressed into service. A panel was even left open for Holman Hunt, but he was too busy at the time to be able to decorate it. All costs of materials, travelling expenses, and board and lodging of such of the artists who were not resident at Oxford were to be defrayed by the Union Society; and so reckless and so extravagant were Rossetti's whims that in the end the cost of the work amounted to considerably more than any reasonable commissions might have done. "I am afraid," Burne-Jones used to say, "that as the task lasted so long, our gift did not turn out to be such a generous one as we meant: indeed, natural complainings were made, and our gift underwent public criticism in the debating room, but Bowen was then Treasurer, and stood up for us and saved us from all inconvenience."<sup>2</sup>

Being the acknowledged leader of a band of disciples suited Rossetti far more than being a mere member of a brotherhood, and his good-humoured extravagances became a legend. "Rossetti was the planet round which we revolved," Prinsep wrote later. "We copied his very way of speaking. All beautiful women were stunners with us. Wombats were the most delightful of God's creatures. Mediaevalism was our beau ideal, and we sank our own individuality in the strong personality of our adored Gabriel."<sup>3</sup>

The adored Gabriel, indeed, was in the highest of spirits and the most amiable of tempers. When he upset from the top of the ladder a large painter's pot full of rare lapis lazuli ground into real ultramarine, he genially remarked: "Oh, that's nothing. We often do that." Erratic, high-handed, despotic, and gay, he would sweep Ned Jones up to London in order to avoid some undesired social engagement, or

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 164.

good-naturedly reprove Morris for his lack of sartorial elegance. "Top, it's disgraceful, you should always have dress clothes with you,"<sup>1</sup> he remarked severely, when Morris tried to excuse himself from some dinner party by pleading the lack of his evening suit.

These were the days of Pre-Raphaelitism's second birth: the days of the advent of the beautiful Jane Burdon, whom William Morris had seen with a rapturous astonishment one evening in a theatre, and who had been persuaded, as Lizzie had been persuaded before her, to pose as a model. Calm and gracious, she sat upon a dais while they all tried to recapture the haunting beauty of her face; until, asking at last to be shown the results of their work, Morris passed up to her a note which said: "I cannot paint you, but I love you:" and so declared himself to her who was to become his wife: and the subject of so many of Rossetti's paintings.

"I may now go on to tell you something about the Oxford pictures," Rossetti wrote to Charles Eliot Norton the following July. "I dare say that you know that the building is by one Woodward—the Debating Room of the Union Society. Its beauty and simple character seemed to make it a delightful receptacle for wall paintings, and accordingly a few of us thought we would decorate it, as an experiment in a style to which I, for one, should like to devote the whole of my time better than to any other branch of the art. With the exception of Arthur Hughes and myself, those engaged upon it have made there almost their début as painters; they are Edward Jones, W. Morris (of whom you saw some stories in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, and who, I think, must have sent you his volume of poems), Spencer Stanhope, Allen, and V. C. Prinsep. Jones' picture is a perfect masterpiece, as is all he does. His subject in the series (which you know is from *Morte d'Arthur*) represents Merlin being imprisoned beneath a stone by the Damsel of the Lake.

"My own subject (for each of us as yet has done only one) is Sir Lancelot prevented by his sin from entering the chapel of the San Grail. . . . As a companion to this I shall paint a design, which I have made for the purpose, of the attainment of the San Grail by Lancelot's son Galahad, together with Bors and Percival.

"The series commences with Pollen's picture, King Arthur obtaining the sword Excalibur from the Damsel of the Lake, and ends with Hughes' Arthur carried away to Avalon and the Sword thrown back into the Lake. The other pictures painted are, first, by Morris, Sir Palomides' jealousy of Sir Tristram; second, by Prinsep, Sir Pelleas leaving the Lady Ettarde; and third, by Stanhope, Sir Gawain's meeting Three Ladies at a Well."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, Munro sculpted a stone shield above the porch, and William Morris, assisted by a band of enthusiastic helpers con-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 199-201.



sisting mostly of University men who stayed up at Oxford during the vacation expressly for the purpose, covered the roof with an elaborate and intricate design of chimerical monsters.

The painters used each other for models; and Morris, whom Rossetti always used to say looked like a knight of the Round Table, appeared both as Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot, clad in armour made by a friendly smith near the castle. For tragic characters, Burne-Jones was used, with his large pale blue eyes and long lank hair; while the magnificent, the "gigantic Val" made the most splendid of Kings, as Burne-Jones' friend, Cormell Price, in an imposing dalmatic, made the most effective priest.

Lizzie, who, at this time, was alone and ill, was painted by Rossetti from memory as Guinevere: but, displeased with the result, he clothed Jane Burdon specially for the part, and later put her in her place: to Ruskin's silent indignation, when he was aware of what had been done.

Ruskin approached this experiment with a mixture of humorous caution and unmeasured praise. When he first came down to see the work, he pronounced Rossetti's effort to be "the finest piece of colour in the world",<sup>1</sup> and adjudged Jones' to be the next best. He even offered to pay Rossetti himself for painting another bay, "provided there is no absolute nonsense in it and the trees are like trees and the stones like stones."<sup>2</sup>

For once he evidently permitted enthusiasm to conquer technical understanding. For he who had so often reproached Rossetti for the use of faulty pigments and quickly fading colours, must have known quite well that paintings in distemper upon whitewashed brick were bound soon to perish. Perhaps he looked upon the whole proceedings as little more than an ambitious joke. Eventually, he washed his hands of them with a good-natured resignation. "You know," he told William Rossetti, "the fact is they are all the least bit crazy, and it is very difficult to manage them."<sup>3</sup>

As may be expected, the project was never properly completed: and what was completed very soon began to fade. Patmore, who went down to see the work in 1857, wrote in the *Saturday Review* for December of that year that the colour was "sweet, bright and pure as a cloud in the sunshine . . . so brilliant as to make the walls look like the margin of an illuminated manuscript":<sup>4</sup> but "some of those connected with the Council of the Union", says Hunt, "saw little to be grateful for in the generosity of the young decorators, and expressed themselves discourteously. Perhaps it was this that disenchanted Rossetti with his design, for he left it abruptly half finished . . . refusing all allurements of Ruskin and others to carry it further".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Letter undated: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 16, p. xlvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Saturday Review*, issue of 26.12.1857.

<sup>5</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 2, p. 133.

"The greatest fiasco ever made by a parcel of men of genius,"<sup>1</sup> W. B. Scott called it: and for a long time afterwards "I have come to my Oxford Union" meant, in certain Oxford circles, the uttermost depression both with regard to money and credit.

Twelve years after it had been begun, however, a member wrote to Rossetti on behalf of the Committee of the Oxford Union, to know "whether he would be willing to finish the blank space left in the middle of his picture, or suggest some method of covering it".<sup>2</sup> Mr. Stanhope had suggested a diaper, "but we are unwilling to entertain this or any other suggestion until we have ascertained from you what are your own wishes on the subject. Should you sanction this plan, you will confer a great favour on us if you will kindly communicate to us any suggestion you may feel inclined to make as to the design or colours of the diaper to be used: but I need hardly say how much we should prefer that the fresco should be finished by the hand of him who commenced it.

"You will be sorry to hear that several of the frescoes are already beginning to show signs of decay: we shall be greatly obliged if you can make any suggestion for their more efficient preservation, for I need hardly say how anxious we are to preserve them. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Evidently Rossetti made some practical suggestions, for on 14 November a second letter was addressed to him stating that "the Union had passed a resolution to spend a sum not exceeding £100 on the completion of Mr. Rossetti's fresco. We are now therefore in a position to ask you to make the arrangements you proposed. . . . Perhaps I may explain that our request that you would name the sum necessary to be expended did not spring from any desire on the part of the Committee to engage you in any responsibility, or to draw you into any contract with the society. . . . Our only wish was to obtain on competent authority an estimate which we were wholly unable to form for ourselves. The selection of the artist to be employed will, of course, rest with you: it will be for us, I presume, to arrange with him the remuneration he is to receive, and to contract with him for the execution of the work."<sup>4</sup>

But despite this diffident and discreet wooing of the by then paranoiac Rossetti, the frescoes seem to have been neither completed nor restored; and gradually the fading continued until they passed into a respectable oblivion.

In 1906, however, by reflecting light upon them with large mirrors, and photographing them with a sensitive plate, reproductions were made and published in book form. While in 1936, the frescoes themselves were fully restored by Professor Tristram.

<sup>1</sup> Minto, *Autobiographical Notes of W. B. Scott*, vol. 2, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 477-8.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 482-3.

The struggle over the Turner will dragged on until 1856, and might well have proved another *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* had not the contending parties finally agreed to settle the matter out of court. Contrary to Turner's express wishes, the projected Home for Decayed Artists of Legitimate Birth, so objectionable to Lady Eastlake, remained a vain chimera: but £20,000 was given to the Royal Academy; *Dido Building Carthage* and *Sun Rising in a Mist* were sent to the National Gallery, and all his pictures, drawings and sketches were considered a gift to the public.

As soon as the news was announced, Ruskin rushed back to London to hurl himself once again into the cause of his earthly Master. Already the previous April he had collaborated with the picture dealer Gambart to produce *The Harbours of England*, a work containing twelve engravings of Turner's marine paintings, with a preface and descriptive and critical comments upon each; and now he wrote eloquently to *The Times*, explaining that he had been appointed an executor of the will, and had resigned only on account of his ignorance of legal matters, although in the course of enquiry he had already catalogued most of the drawings. The extent of the collection he enumerated at some length: in detail he explained how best the drawings should be framed: offered not only to frame a hundred drawings in the best manner at his own expense, but to produce and print a catalogue explaining them fully to the public, provided that the entire management of the drawings in every particular was entrusted to himself. This he followed up by a letter to the Trustees of the National Gallery, in which he detailed the project at further length; and also by a personal letter to Lord Palmerston, in which he explained that he had devoted the greater part of his life to the study of Turner, repeated the offer he had already made publicly in *The Times*, and admitted that his motives were to take care of the drawings, make them as useful to the public as he could, and to have the pleasure of the work for its own sake, his claim to fitness for the task being that his own collection of Turners was the third in importance among private collections. "The Trustees of the National Gallery have opened a Circumlocution Office correspondence with me," he wrote to Mrs. Browning in December 1856, "and we are just in the first whorl of the shell. Whether any Blue is at the Murex bottom I know not yet—the Pudding Pause of Xmas has stopped us for the present."<sup>1</sup> And a fortnight later he was telling Newton: "I am occupied at present chiefly in my old way concerning Turner—and most likely shall continue to be so, as the adjudgment of all his sketches to the nation puts it in my power to study him far more fully and easily than formerly. I offered to arrange and catalogue them all

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 28.12.1856: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 253.

(and there are some twenty thousand in number according to Wornum's statement) and have had some official communication with the Trustees about it. I believe, in the end, whatever they may determine upon just now, I shall have to do it for them, for the simple reason that they *cannot* do it themselves, nor get it done, there being literally nobody, except myself, who knows where Turner's subjects were taken, or their sequence, chronologically. I have written a catalogue of the pictures, explaining them as well as I can, by way of specimen of what may be done in this way, and if the public like it, they will perhaps want the drawings catalogued too."<sup>1</sup>

After this unorthodox procedure, there was a long wait: and, as though completely unaware of the value of his offer, the Trustees and Directors of the National Gallery proceeded to exhibit Turner drawings at Marlborough House on their own account. At first thirty-four were cleaned, varnished and carefully framed, and Ruskin obligingly wrote catalogue notes for them. But when these were followed by a collection of drawings, many of them from the *Liber Studiorum*, exhibited on temporary screens in a manner which he deplored, and selected without any apparent method, he declined to have any further part in the venture. But evidently Lord Palmerston, realising that nothing but professional jealousy could be the cause of Ruskin's offer not being accepted with alacrity, must have used his influence; for early in February Ruskin was informed by the Trustees of the Gallery that he could begin.

Honorary curator of the public collection of his beloved Turner's works at last, Ruskin devoted himself fervently to selecting and cataloguing. A hundred drawings were carefully mounted and framed, and housed in special mahogany cabinets; a catalogue of the Turner sketches in the National Gallery was duly printed for private circulation; and having at length approved the practical efficiency of Ruskin's methods, the Trustees and Directors of the National Gallery very graciously permitted him to continue, and to supply cabinets with sliding frames for a further four hundred drawings, at his own expense: which drawings he did not catalogue, however, until 1881. The sorting of the Turner drawings was an arduous occupation, and between 1857 and 1858 Ruskin worked, with George Allen helping him, at selecting and mounting, for eight months, "every day, all day long and often far into the night", and "never felt so much exhausted as when I locked the last box and gave the keys to Mr. Wornum in 1858".<sup>2</sup> Wornum, the Keeper of the Gallery, apparently resented Ruskin's activities, and there was a good deal of friction between them; though his own love of the drawings of Turner was such that hundreds of them were left neglected in piles to collect mildew. Ruskin, coming upon them later under an old tarpaulin

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.1.1857: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, p. 5.

when the galleries were being enlarged, in 1861, was obliged to spend another long period cleaning them. "I should have tried to get abroad before this," Ruskin wrote to Rawdon Brown in May 1862, "but found they had let all the Turner drawings get mildewed at the National Gallery during its repairs. So I stayed to get the mildew off as well as I could, and henceforward I've done with the whole business; and have told them they must take it off, themselves, next time, or leave it on—if they like."<sup>1</sup> As Ruskin wrote later in *The Cestus of Aglaia*, Turner's bequest was valued not even at so much as the space of dead brick wall it would cover; his work being left for years packed in parcels at the National Gallery, or being conclusively out of sight under the shadowy iron vaults of Kensington. When Ruskin was working in the basement of the National Gallery upon the Turner drawings, it became a habit for his friends to visit him there. Stacy Marks, who had written a lampoon upon him, one day called and found him "perfectly simple, unaffected, kindly and human",<sup>2</sup> surrounded by piles of sketch books and loose drawings that he was mounting and framing with his own hands. Edward Jones and his young wife would amuse themselves for hours with the drawings that lay about, while Ruskin worked and talked, and pointed out special features for attention. Rumour has it that many sketches of sailors in brothels, and similar subjects, were burned by Ruskin, upon the authority of the Trustees, as being undesirable. But the legend rests upon an entry in William Rossetti's diaries, and while William Rossetti recorded accurately enough what he heard, he never seems to have been at pains to verify the truth of such reports as reached his ears.

## 4

By 1855, even if his name was by no means yet a household word, Ruskin was known as one of the most important of living art critics; and, at a time when most of the best modern pictures belonged to Manchester men who were wont suddenly to declare, as Monckton-Milnes wrote to a friend, that they were getting tired of them and proposed to "go into orchids instead", so many people asked his advice or solicited his opinion about works in the season's Academy that, partly in order to save himself a vast unnecessary correspondence, for the next four years he compiled and printed his *Academy Notes*, in which he stated, with customary detachment, humour and force, his views upon those pictures which seemed to him "to call for particular praise or censure". These *Academy Notes*, which enjoyed no official privileges of any kind, were sold in the streets outside the exhibition, and usually went into several impressions. By the Royal Academy itself they were considered little more than a gratuitous affront; and certain artists are said to have received Ruskin's criticisms

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.5.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> H. S. Marks, *Pen and Pencil Sketches* (1894), vol. 2, p. 165.

with such dudgeon that they would markedly cross the road and walk on the other side whenever their author appeared. David Roberts, whose work Ruskin had admired so greatly in his youth, is said to have received a personal note from Ruskin, before one of his attacks, to say that he hoped that the expression of opinions dictated by his public duty as a critic would in no way interfere with the feelings of sincere friendship which he hoped would always exist between them: to which the painter replied that when he met the critic he would have much pleasure in thrashing him, and hoped that a broken head would not interfere with the same feelings of friendship which he also hoped would exist always between them.

*Punch* wittily recorded the situation in a Poem by a Perfectly Furious Academician.

"I takes and paints,  
Hears no complaints,  
And sells before I'm dry;  
Till Savage Ruskin  
He sticks his tusk in,  
Then nobody will buy.

N.B. Confound Ruskin: only that won't come into poetry—  
but it's true."<sup>1</sup>

Affecting to despise his opinions when they were adverse, many painters nevertheless regarded his words with the utmost weight, as is evident from the fact that, when Ruskin once expressed surprise that no painter had as yet attempted to paint the delicate pink of apple blossom against a tender April sky, the walls of the Academy burgeoned with apple orchards the following season. Millais (whose remarks upon Ruskin at this time were always of the most acrimonious) exhibited *Spring: Horsley, Blossom Time:* and Hughes, *The King's Orchard*. "Ruskin has much to answer for," another critic remarked: "Probably such an avalanche of misconception and untruth was never let loose on the patient art-loving, nature-loving wanderer before. From Millais (who paints blossoms as big as babies' heads, growing on trees in full leaf) down to the sorriest scrub who seeks a teacher's certificate from the Department of Art, all appear to have taken apple blossom fever, and to have painted the blossoms when at the height of their delirium."<sup>2</sup>

It is needless to say that as a critic Ruskin was strictly impersonal in his judgments, and followed such criteria as he deemed to be true with equal regard to praise or censure. No man could have been more enthusiastic when he felt praise was due: no man could be more witheringly contemptuous over weakness or banality. "It is the only *great* picture exhibited this year: but this is very great. The immortal

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 14, p. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxiv.

element in it is to the full. It is easily understood, and the public very generally understand it—"1 he wrote of Millais' *The Rescue*, exhibited in 1855, the year that he was married to Euphemia Gray: while his notice of *The Graces*, by W. E. Frost, is equally illustrative of the critic in blighting mood. "I believe Mr. Frost might be a painter if he chose; but he will not become one by multiplying studies of this kind, looking like Etty's with all the colour scraped off. Everybody knows well enough, by this time, that Graces always stand on one leg, and bend the other, and never have anything to fasten their dresses with at the waists. Cannot Mr. Frost tell us something new?"2

This was no more vitriolic than much other contemporary criticism: the trouble was that it carried far greater weight. Moreover, whether in praise or blame, there was often a quality of arrogance, of an almost morbid self-assertiveness, in Ruskin's pronouncements that was probably due to his unconscious reaction against the unnaturally subservient position in the family into which he was still persistently thrust. And though generously and consistently he set himself to be of use to young artists, it was more than ever in a manner that usually ended in their taking umbrage.

In 1856, when in Switzerland, he spent some weeks with Inchbold, and bought or commissioned some drawings of cottages "when he couldn't sell anything, to help him a little—I wanted and ordered of him (he wrote later to his father) four more cottages; but he got entirely off the rails at Chamouni, and the cottages are failures. I stayed with him some time, or rather made him stay with me, at Bellinzona, in order to make him understand where he was wrong. He was vexed with his work and yet thought it was right, and didn't know why he didn't like it, nor why nobody liked it. It was a delicate and difficult matter to make him gradually find out his faults (it's no use *telling* a man of them) and took me a fortnight of innuendoes."3

Two years later, he was playing the patron to T. Brett, A.R.A., and commissioned from him a painting of the Val d'Aosta, which was hung in the Academy and later adorned the drawing-room at Denmark Hill. "He has been here a week today," Ruskin wrote to his father from Turin on 26 August. "I sent for him . . . because I didn't like what he said in his letter about his present work, and thought he wanted some lecturing like Inchbold: besides that, he could give me some useful hints. He is much tougher and stronger than Inchbold, and takes more hammering; but I think he looks more miserable every day, and have good hope of making him completely wretched in a day or two more—and then I shall send him back to his castle. . . ."4

But evidently Brett was not tough enough to stand Ruskin's con-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 9.8.1858: *Works*, vol. 14, p. xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 26.8.1858: *Works*, vol. 14, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

tinual strictures. Indeed, he ended by losing his temper and calling his patron a fool: which hastily ended yet another artistic association.

Yet despite this apparent acerbity, Ruskin's intentions as a critic were always of the most generous. "Do you really suppose that I want to keep you back?" he wrote to J. J. Laing in 1858, a young man whom he had employed, at his own request, to help him with his work. "I have many faults—sensuality, covetousness, laziness—lots of things I could tell you of—but God knows, and I take Him solemnly to witness thereto this day, that if I could make you, or any one, greater than myself in any way whatever, I would do so instantly, and my only vexation with my pupils is when I can't get them to do what I think good for them; my chief joy, when they do great things."<sup>1</sup>

It was to Frederick Leighton, the new talent that had suddenly appeared in the artistic world and caused Thackeray to tell Millais that he had better look to his laurels, or Leighton would be P.R.A. before him, that Ruskin was soon to explain his methods of criticism. Leighton had early admired Ruskin's works, and had written to his mother from Rome in 1852: "I long to find myself again face to face with Nature, to follow it, to watch it, and to copy it, closely, faithfully, ingenuously—as Ruskin suggests, choosing nothing and rejecting nothing."<sup>2</sup> And when, later, he was in London, and, through Browning, made Ruskin's acquaintance, he told his parents how Ruskin had spoken of his "enormous power and sense of beauty",<sup>3</sup> the former of which he modestly denied. Yet he could not conceal his impatience when Ruskin somewhat unnecessarily compared his *Cimabue's Madonna* with Millais' *Rescue*. "I do wonder at the critics: will they never let 'the cat die'?" he complained to his mother. "What Ruskin means by Millais' picture being 'greater' than mine is that the joy of a mother over her rescued children is a higher order of emotion than any expressed in my picture. I wish people would remember St. Paul on the subject of hateful comparisons: 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory'. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless when Leighton was attacked by the critics, and Ruskin told his friend, Mr. Sartoris, that it didn't really signify what they wrote, as talent and genius must prevail in the long run, Henry Greville passed on the news with great satisfaction. To be able to repeat some favourable comment of Ruskin—this was one of the great ambitions of the promising young painters of the late 'fifties, much as they may have professed to deride his strictures. "Though Ruskin stayed about three hours and was altogether very pleasant," Leighton wrote to his mother later of a visit the great critic had paid to his studio, "he did not say anything I could quote about my paintings.

<sup>1</sup> Letter (undated): *Works*, vol. 36, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. R. Leighton, *Life, Letters and Work of Frederick Leighton* (1906), vol. 1, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.



He was *immensely* struck by my drawing of a lemon tree, and was generally complimentary, or rather, *respectful*, that is more his *genre*." On the next occasion, however, "he was in one of his queer moods when he came to breakfast with me—he spent his time looking at my portfolio and praised my drawings most lavishly—he did not even look at my pictures. However, nothing could be more cordial than he is to me."<sup>1</sup>

In 1863, in his lightest and tenderest vein, Ruskin did criticise Leighton's pictures that were hung that year in the Academy. "I've only just had time to look in, yesterday, at the R. Ac.," he wrote, "and your pictures are the only ones that interest me in it, and the two pretty ones, peacocks and basket, interest me much. Ahab I don't much like. You know you, like all people good for anything in this age and country (as far as Palmerston), are still a boy—and a boy can't paint Elijah. But the pretty girls are very nice—very *nearly* beautiful. I can't say more, can I? If they *were* beautiful, they would be immortal too. But if I don't pitch into you when I get hold of you again for not drawing Cangchora's basket as well as her head and hair . . . the meshes are all wrong—*inelegantly* wrong—which is unpardonable. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

"It is proper that an accessory be slightly—sometimes even, in a measure, badly—painted," he continued in a second letter; "but not that it should be out of perspective; and in the greatest men, their enjoyment and power animated the very dust under the feet of their figures, much more the baskets on their heads: above all things, what comes near a head should be studied in every line.

"There is nothing more notable to my mind in the minor tricks of the great Venetians than the exquisite perspective of bandeaux, braids, garlands, jewels, flowers or anything else which aids the *roundings* of their heads."<sup>3</sup>

Finally, to Leighton's complaint that he did not focus his criticism, Ruskin explained his critical method. "You are quite right—'ten times right'—in saying I never focus criticism . . . I measure faults not by their greatness, but their avoidableness. A man's great faults are natural to him—inevitable; if very great, undemonstrable, deep in the innermost of things. I never or rarely speak of them. They must be forgiven, or the picture left. But a common fault in perspective is not to be so passed by. You may not tell your friend, but with deepest reserve, your thoughts of the conduct of his life, but you tell him, if he has an ugly coat, to change his tailor, without fear of his answering that you don't focus your criticism. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

That Ruskin's *Academy Notes* made him many enemies is evident enough. "Hunt has not sold his picture and is not likely to now for a

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 120–1.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 121–2.

long time," Woolner wrote to Mrs. Tennyson apropos the Royal Academy Exhibition in May 1856. "Ruskin has been cutting it up and praised some of the worst pictures in the place; he has made such an obvious mess of it this year, that his enemies are dancing for delight. Hunt says as he has no wife and youngsters he cares very little for it. . . . I should like Ruskin to know what he never knew—the want of money for a year or two; then he might come to doubt his infallibility and give an artist working on the right road the benefit of any little doubt that might arise. The little despot imagines himself the Pope of Art and would wear three crowns as a right, only they would make him look funny in London!"<sup>1</sup> Woolner, indeed, now never lost an opportunity of trying to pour contempt upon Ruskin; principally because Ruskin could not abide his pretty, vapid insipidities and never mentioned him amongst the Pre-Raphaelites. Indeed, Ruskin's preference for the work of sculptors other than himself lashed Woolner, who was prepared to go to the most unscrupulous lengths in order to advertise his own wares, to a state of vitriolic fury. "Ruskin came in while I was there," he told Mrs. Tennyson in 1859, of an evening party at Carlyle's, "and commenced a buzz of inflated rapture upon a piece of charlatanry called *Victory*, by Marochetti, now being shown at Apsley House. . . . Ruskin's inflation was met in a manner that I think one so good and kind as you could not with your utmost efforts imagine; but we certainly gave the conceited critic something to reflect upon. When he was gone we both agreed that a man who took Marochetti as his ideal Sculptor, Louis Napoleon as his favourite king and politician, and Spurgeon for his best beloved theologian, was certainly an unsafe guide for women and the youths of England; for besides these his trusting admirers are few. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Such was the attitude now of a man who, but few years before, had impartially filled his log book with eulogies of *Modern Painters*.

## 5

As a lecturer, Ruskin soon acquired ease and distinction of manner, and his method of tempering earnestness with humour proved a great success. Between March 1857 and March 1860 he delivered seventeen addresses which were later published in volume form: often he spoke for nearly two hours; and whenever he could arrange it, the profits from his lectures were given to the Working Men's College. Very often the opinion of the public and the press with regard to Ruskin's lectures was widely divergent. The *Political Economy of Art*, for example (later reprinted as *A Joy for Ever*), was received by the audience with great enthusiasm; while the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, true to Manchester tradition, considered his plea for State

<sup>1</sup> Amy Woolner, *Thomas Woolner: His Life and Letters*, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 183.

control "arrant nonsense"<sup>1</sup> and lavishly supported its contumely with quotations from Macaulay. When he lectured at Bradford in 1859, however, according to the *Bradford Observer* he "attracted a very numerous and distinguished assembly"<sup>2</sup>—the greatest that had ever been assembled since the days of Thackeray. And at a later date, when Carlyle heard him speak at The Institution, Albemarle Street, on *Tree Leaves as Physiological, Pictorial, Moral and Symbolical objects*, he wrote to his brother: "A crammed house, but tolerable to me even in the gallery. The lecture was thought to break down, and indeed it did, as a lecture, but only did from embarras de richesse—a rare case. I do not recollect to have heard in that place any neatest thing I liked so well as this chaotic one."<sup>3</sup>

It was as lectures that Ruskin wrote the two works later printed in volume form as *A Joy for Ever* and *The Two Paths*: works which both connect his theories of art with economic and practical life. In these works he first expressed several ideas which were to play an important part in the development of his later theory and practice. Important among these was the principle that the true political economy of art implies the finding and training of genius to the best advantage, and the housing and distribution of works of art so that they can produce the greatest impression upon the greatest number. Ruskin was directly opposed to the idea that art should be made cheap beyond a certain point. That prices should be such that every cultured and appreciative person could have one or two original works of art for his own delight, he advocated: but that they should be so low as to place them easily within the reach of everyone, he deplored. For the amount of pleasure to be derived from any great work varies according to the quantity and quality of attention and of mental energy that can be brought to bear upon it; and such attention depends very largely upon the freshness of the work. Familiarity soon dims the acuteness of impressions, and the only way fully to appreciate a great work is to see it but seldom. This is the chief reason why Ruskin advised people never under any circumstances whatever to buy copies. Copies, in Ruskin's view—and later he was himself to employ artists in making them—are to be considered useful only when their work is regarded in the light of historical documentation and recording.

It is in *A Joy for Ever*, too, that Ruskin first seriously broaches the educational and social theories that were later to become the main occupation of his life. "Every so named soul of man claims from every other such soul protection and education in childhood—help or punishment in middle life—reward or relief, if needed, in old age. . . ."<sup>4</sup> This is the foundation upon which, later, he erected the whole structure of his social credo; just as here he formulated also for the

<sup>1</sup> Issue of 14.7.1858.

<sup>2</sup> Issue of 3.3.1859.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, p. lix.

<sup>4</sup> *A Joy for Ever: Works*, vol. 16, p. 115.

first time the basis of his theory of education. The problem of education, for Ruskin, from the beginning, was the problem of devising a system in which the chance of advancement in life is open to all men to the extent of their essential capacities; but also of devising one that will procure the maximum of satisfaction for those whose capacities are essentially limited to activity in lower spheres. Thus the first necessity is a system of trial schools, "in which the knowledge offered and the discipline enforced shall be all a part of a great assay of the human soul, and in which the one shall be increased, the other directed, as the tried heart and brain will best bear, and no otherwise".<sup>1</sup> Emulation, in education, must be understood to be a false motive, just as competition by means of prize winning must be recognised as a false means. Examination should be practised only as a means of ascertaining progress and capacity: never as an arena for victory.

It is his belief in the capacity of man to live at a maximum of his functional power far beyond any he usually enjoys that is the foundation of all Ruskin's theories: and therefore right education should be devoted entirely toward cultivating this art.

In *The Two Paths*, Ruskin elaborated one of the problems which he had postulated shortly before in his *Cambridge Inaugural Address*. "This is the great Enigma of Art History," he had then declared, "that you must not follow art without pleasure, nor must you follow it for the sake of pleasure. And the solution of that enigma is simply this fact: that wherever Art has been followed *only* for the sake of luxury of delight, it has contributed, and largely contributed, to bring about the destruction of the nation practising it: but wherever Art has been used *also* to teach any truth or supposed truth—religious, moral or natural—there it has elevated the nation practising it, and itself with the nation."<sup>2</sup> Now, in a lecture entitled *The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations*, delivered at the opening of the Architectural Museum, South Kensington, in January 1858, he maintained that "wherever art is practised for its own sake, and the delight of the workman is in what he *does* and *produces*, instead of in what he *interprets* or *exhibits*—there art has an influence of the most fatal kind on brain and heart, and it issues, if long so pursued, in the *destruction both of intellectual power and moral principle*: whereas art, devoted humbly and self-forgetfully to the clear statement and record of the facts of the universe, is always helpful and beneficent to mankind, full of comfort, strength and salvation".<sup>3</sup> For truth alone is the medium by which life can be realised, and "wheresoever the search after truth begins, there life begins; wheresoever the search ceases, there life ceases".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 16, p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> *The Two Paths: Works*, vol. 16, p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 272.

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## Chapter IV

1. Publication of "Modern Painters", III, IV and V: the basis of its philosophy: the foundations of art criticism. 3. Consistency of the work: the criterion of true art: ποιησις—the faculty to create, to "do": necessity for consciousness and will: great art implies great understanding. 4. Reception of the book: George Eliot's praise: Lady Eastlake's strictures: approval of the press. 5. Philosophy and practice: Smetham's enthusiasm and disillusionment. 6. Farewell to Turner: the end of a phase.

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1

DESPITE the energy and enthusiasm which Ruskin gave to so many different projects during the years 1854–1860, the utmost of his capacities were given to the completion of *Modern Painters*. "I will make *Modern Painters* so complete a monument of him (Turner), D.V.," he had written to his father as early as 1852, "that there will be nothing left for the *Life* but when he was born, and where he lived, and whom he dined with on this or that occasion. All of which may be stated by anybody."<sup>1</sup> This was written, evidently, in a mood of that pride and ambition which Ruskin expressed on many occasions as being fatal to the production of all good work. But the essence of the book was conceived at moments of deep understanding, awareness, and in this lies its abiding value.

The third volume, which had taken nearly eighteen months to write, was published, with many illustrations, at 38/–, in January 1856. The fourth volume, which cost 50/–, followed close upon it in April of the same year; while the fifth volume did not appear until over four years later, during which time many of Ruskin's ideas were maturing in some directions, and becoming modified in others; so that the end of the book caused him more thought and exertion than most of the rest of it put together. Perhaps by now something of the original impulse had worn itself out; and he would have preferred already to devote himself exclusively to the sociological interests that were to dominate the subsequent period of his life. "I am at work upon it in a careless, listless way," he wrote to Charles Eliot Norton from Schaffhausen on 31 July, 1859, "but it won't be the worse for the different tempers it will be written in. There will be little or no bombast in it, I hope, and some deeper truths than I knew—even a year ago."<sup>2</sup> The following December he added: "*Modern Painters* is giving me more trouble than I can well stand, and I *can't* do any-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1.1.1852: *Works*, vol. 5, p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 36, p. 311.

thing else till it is out of the way. . . ."<sup>1</sup> His dilatoriness in completing the work had for long been a source of grievance to his father, and of amusement to his friends. "I often tell him that *Modern Painters* will be Old Masters long before he has finished,"<sup>2</sup> Rossetti remarked wittily to a companion. And when, after his return home from a long holiday in 1859, John James had remarked somewhat bitterly that if his son did not finish the book now, he would probably never live to see it, Ruskin temporarily gave up all else in order to complete his task.

## 2

The third, fourth and fifth volumes of *Modern Painters* complete the fundamental philosophic and psychological structure of Ruskin's comprehensive theory of art criticism. Though, at intervals, he was to continue to write prolifically upon art until the end of his life, these later writings only complement in detail the great work that he completed in his forty-second year.

In his preface to the third volume, Ruskin maintained that there were laws which governed painting no less fixed than those which govern harmony in music, and that such laws can be, and can only be, ascertained after years of careful and devoted study. Having devoted the best years of his life, the highest powers of his mind, the most ardent enthusiasm and greatest energy of his nature to elucidating such laws, he had the same right as a scientist to expect to be listened to as one speaking with authority.

The task of the critic implies at least some understanding of many different sciences. Not only must he be acquainted with the works of all great artists, and conversant with the historical and sociological aspects of the periods in which they lived, he must also be a fair metaphysician, a keen and careful observer of all the phenomena of the natural world, and have reasonable knowledge of such contingent and diverse subjects as optics, geometry, geology, botany and anatomy. As Ruskin himself knew, the value of his work lay in the assimilation and synthesis of all the apparently unconnected interests which had occupied his keen and analytical mind, and attracted his tender and curious sensibilities, since his earliest youth. Thus his book had formed itself as a convenient vehicle for the expression of his highly original and comprehensive genius. Not only his love and knowledge of classical and contemporary painting, and of classical and contemporary literature, was brought into play; not only his biblical and classical erudition, and the peculiar mixture of the analytical and metaphysical approach that was his especial gift; not only a combination of the fine sensibilities of the artist with the penetrating

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 5.12.1859: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 139.

insight of the scientist: but also the results of his continual study and observations in every sphere from botany and geology down to the cyanometry which had been his singular interest as a boy. "Great art is produced only by men who feel acutely and nobly; and is always in some measure an expression of their personal feeling"<sup>1</sup>—so that photographic imitation, no matter how skilled, without penetrative imagination is not to be considered as high or fine art any more than the reflections in a mirror. It is only the nobility of the intention of the painter that imbues his work with worth, and great and mean art are separated not by methods of technique, style of composition or choice of subject, but solely by the aim of the artist, who is great, no matter the degree of his talent, only to the extent that he reveals ultimate truths and arouses elevated emotions. Thus true art criticism lies beyond the recognition of technical skill and the rules of draughtsmanship, and can be exact only to the extent that it is based upon an emotional-psychological understanding of all the instincts and aspirations of human nature, and an uncorrupted appreciation of all the beauties of the visible created world.

Greatness of style, therefore, lies in the habitual choice of subjects which give scope for the communication of noble ideas and deep and serious emotions: triviality, in those which can arouse only idle thought and paltry feeling. The corruption of great art consists in the sacrifice of truth to false ideals of beauty: for whereas great art portrays the beautiful, and accepts Nature as she is, mean art avoids or transforms the ugly, and avoids creative discrimination by altering all that it does not admire. Since great art can neither alter nor improve Nature, it seeks first to penetrate to her greatest truths; and, having done so, to communicate to others a perfect vision of the natural world.

Yet no art can be truly great without invention—without being constructed by the highest faculties of the imagination. And because such faculties are innate, and can never be self-created—because no man can create a work of art beyond the highest level of his essential capacity, no matter that he takes very great, or even infinite, pains—it follows that genius is a miracle and an accident of birth.

It is useless to try to teach great art in the schools. As great art is the finest flower of great being, so the only right education in art is that which cultivates the understanding of the pupil to appreciate the essential principles of the subject, while simultaneously helping him to make the best of his own capacities without destroying himself in the vain and impossible effort to transcend them. "You may teach imitation; because the meanest man can imitate; but you can teach neither idealism nor composition, because only a great man can choose, conceive, or compose; and he does all these necessarily, because of his nature. His greatness is in his choice of things, in his

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 5, p. 32.

analysis of them, and his combining powers involve the totality of his knowledge in life. His methods of observation and abstraction are essential habits of his thought, conditions of his being."<sup>1</sup>

The understanding of the essential principles of art is not an abstract matter. It is strictly relative to, and dependent upon, a right understanding of man's duty and function in the world in which he lives. Such right understanding consists, for Ruskin, in three things. Accurate self-knowledge, and accurate knowledge of the things he has to deal with. Happiness in himself, and in the existing state of things—"To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray—these are the things that make men happy."<sup>2</sup> And self-improvement, and improvement of the existing state of things, to the extent that they are defective and can by him be improved. Art exists, that is to say, as a means to the fulfilment of true life, and for no other reason. It acts in direct opposition to the general fear of the knowledge of truth, the general delight in agreeable lies, the general tendency to escape from the reality of consciousness into flights of fantasy towards past or future, and to build our lives upon an unreal world of involuntary imagination. For imagination, which can be the highest faculty of the human mind, too easily becomes debased by lack of control into a mechanical flight from truth. Only when the artist intuitively understands this, and works in humility and stress to convey reality, can his work belong to the category that increases life, and not death. Only then can it be realised that true finish of technique means the capacity to portray truth in its most perfect form.

The function of the artist is not only to awaken the highest imagination in others, but also to guide it—such guidance being salutary only when it coincides with truth. This implies, in great art, the communication and expression of the mind of a God-made great man, and is therefore inevitably something extraordinary, powerful and unique. It is the gift, in Ruskin's language, of inspiration, the gift of seeing reality, the gift which transcends the pathetic fallacy of enduing the natural world with human feelings.

## 3

"Every day convinces me more and more that no warnings can preserve from misunderstanding those who have no desire to understand."<sup>3</sup> So Ruskin concluded the preface to his fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, wearied at last by the repeated charges of inconsistency levelled at him by superficial critics who refused to appreciate

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 5, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 6, p. 5.



that even the most complex matters could be approached by the same mind from more than one point. That Ruskin should have changed his mind over certain matters while writing upon them over a great number of years is inevitable. Nevertheless, a study of the whole of his work, deeply rooted as it was in the humanistic spirit, shows that, no matter how his ideas developed, they never exceeded the contours of organic growth or assumed a form unpredictable in their origin. As he declared in the preface to his final volume: "These oscillations of temper and progressions of discovery, extending over a period of seventeen years, ought not to diminish the reader's confidence in the book. Let him be assured of this, that unless important changes are occurring in his opinions continually, all his life long, not one of these opinions can be on any questionable subject true. All true opinions are living, and show their life by being capable of nourishment; therefore of change. But their change is that of a tree—not of a cloud.

"In the main aim and principle of the book, there is no variation, from its first syllable to its last. It declares the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God; and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to, that. And it differs from most books, and has a chance of being in some respects better for the difference, in that it has not been written either for fame, or for money, or for conscience sake, but of necessity."<sup>1</sup>

This necessity was the inner compulsion that prompts all true art—the compulsion to transmit his own vision and understanding of the natural world to all who could participate in it. And the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God that he declared was his exact observation of the form, and his understanding of the intricate laws, which govern the growth and being of the natural objects of the phenomenal world. The geological structure of mountains, and their accurate perception by that mechanism which is the human eye: the aspect of bird and leaf and stem and trunk, and the exact knowledge of the laws of their organic growth: the formation and the grouping of flying clouds: all these are detailed in his work with the love and wisdom of many years of devoted study, in order to prove that the test of great art lies in the extent to which the revelation of the artist conforms to the highest known truth of the scene which he has sought to recreate. For to be able to paint one leaf without distortion is to be able to paint the world.

Its relation to God and to man; or, more precisely, its effect upon man in his relation to God—this is the fundamental criterion of true art: and both spiritual and formal invention are of value only to the extent that they aid man in his relations with the infinite world. Whether art is vital or decadent can be judged only in relation to man's true life. The pure and the clean is that which is consistent

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, p. 9.

with life; the impure, the unclean that which impedes it; the greatest decadence that which in its essence contradicts the laws of life. "A pure or holy state of anything, therefore, is that in which all its parts are helpful or consistent. They may or may not be homogeneous. The highest or organic purities are composed of many elements in an entirely helpful state. The highest and first law of the universe—and the other name of life, is therefore 'help'. The other name of death is 'separation'. Government and co-operation are in all things and eternally the laws of life. Anarchy and competition, eternally, and in all things, the laws of death."<sup>1</sup> This, the great law which governs art, is also, for Ruskin, as we shall see later, the great law which governs true political economy. Clay, left to itself to follow its own instinct of unity, becomes sapphire, and soot diamond. So, miraculously, when governed by the primal law of life, acts the recreative power of art, transforming coarse materials into a beauty greater than the sun's.

This power of art to produce beauty, the result of true creative invention, is the greatest possible faculty of the human soul. It is the faculty of *ποίησις*—doing—with full deliberation and consciousness. This, the fact that great art is a deliberate and conscious action, is one of the most important axioms, and one of the most little understood, in the whole structure of Ruskinian thought. It is of supreme importance because it excludes from the category of great art all work done without deliberate purpose and resolve. When, accidentally or mechanically, works are produced without such conscious purposes, they may be considered as effects or results, or as agents and causes. But no doing, in the true sense, has been responsible for them, and for this reason, they cannot be classified as art.

In ordinary life, the greater part of the things that happen (as Tolstoy has illustrated in his "law of inevitability") are brought about not by conscious will but by the interplay of accidental forces. The majority of human beings act, from inertia, like logs or stones. Or else like weeds and thorns, they merely trip and tear. Such people produce the suffering of the world. They crush, impede, vitiate: but are without the faculty of conscious action. Even when such men produce effects, their effects are the effects of reaction—never of true action. For unless an effect is produced by deliberate intent, it can never be termed the result of *ποίησις*, of true doing, of true action. In order to do, to create, every result of an action must be accurately foreseen. And such foresight can never be possessed by one who does not understand, and obey, the laws of the universe which are also the laws of God. Thus *ποίησις*, true doing, the creation of great art, implies not only consciousness, but understanding and faith. It implies, moreover, an emotional purpose, or motive, which of all requirements in art is the most important.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 207-8.

After the motive, the structure of a work of art requires complete control of all the faculties, emotional and imaginative, accompanied by perfect detachment of spirit and serenity of temper. It is not possible to produce a great work of art otherwise. "Unless the feelings are completely under control, the least excitement or passion will disturb the measured equity of power: a painter needs to be as cool as a general; and as little moved or subdued by his sense of pleasure, as a soldier by the sense of pain. Nothing good can be done without intense feeling; but it must be feeling so crushed, that the work is set about with mechanical steadiness, absolutely untroubled as a surgeon—not without pity, but conquering it and putting it aside—begins an operation. Until the feelings can give strength enough to the will to enable it to conquer them, they are not strong enough. If you cannot leave your picture at any moment;—cannot turn from it, and go on with another while the colour is drying;—cannot work at any part of it you choose with equal contentment—you have not firm enough grasp of it."<sup>1</sup> For whereas emotional excitement of a temperate, equable and joyful nature may invigorate the organism and replenish the energies, all emotions of anger, indignation, grief, anxiety, vanity or scorn, are deadly alike to body and mind in their enervating power and their clouding of the understanding. No one can produce great art save in a right state of mind, and all works which are the result of egotism, vanity, selfishness and petty personal ambition are doomed, no matter how great may be their ephemeral success, to ultimate oblivion. Neither cleverness nor falsity nor skill can produce an artist. Only "perfectness of mind, unity, depth, decision,—the highest qualities, in fine, of the intellect", can form the imagination. For the product of the awakened imagination is perfect truth.

And truth is revealed to man only by means of the dark mirror which is himself—the mirror which reflects also, albeit obscurely, macrocosm in microcosm, the greatest attributes of deity. Vision, or love—these can be apprehended by man only when he has learned to look clear-sightedly within. To know oneself is the only key to understanding, for only through the self can be perceived the ultimate reality which is God.

To understand art, therefore, it is first of all necessary to understand man. An art which involves misconception of man, or a base idea of him, is to that extent a base and false art. And just as the nature of man is dual, nobly animal and nobly spiritual, so an art which denies either of these assets is to that extent false. That alone is great art which understands and portrays man in his completeness.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, p. 248.

"I have bought the third volume of *Modern Painters*, and I mean to read it with the slowness, iteration and thought which it deserves," James Smetham wrote to a friend in the summer of 1856. "I have glanced at the chapter on 'Finish', and I see the exquisite definition of it: 'added fact'. How clear, how true! Finish, from first to last—added fact. How this leads to the great principle, *study nature*. . . ."<sup>1</sup> "These books," wrote George Eliot of volumes III and IV, "contain, I think, some of the finest writings of the age. He is strongly akin to the sublimest part of Wordsworth."<sup>2</sup>

Lady Eastlake, on the other hand, wrote an article upon the first three volumes of the work for the March number of the *Quarterly Review*, in which she solemnly assured her readers that "the sole function of art was to make pretty things", and that "one great proof, were there no other, of the falseness of Mr. Ruskin's reasoning is its quantity. . . ." "As regards quantity, however, it is easy to foresee that Mr. Ruskin will always have the advantage. Nature has given him the mechanism of thinking in a most peculiar degree. The exercise of this faculty, which is always more or less an exertion and strain to other minds, is none to his, and no wonder; for sophistry travels on roads where, however much dust, there are neither stones nor tolls. Though, therefore, the broad false principles he has laid down may be easily refuted, yet it may be doubted whether any mind will have the patience to follow all the windings of one who thinks equally without conscience and weariness. A man may attack iron bars, oak doors or stone walls, and hope with energy and perseverance to break his way through; but to follow a thin thread, which leads him through twisting and slippery paths, and is always snapping at an honest touch, requires a strength of nerve and tenacity of purpose, which Mr. Ruskin's writings will hardly inspire, or their reputation reward."<sup>3</sup> So incensed were the young William Morris and Ned Jones by this inept effusion that Jones wrote an essay entitled *Ruskin and the Quarterly* for the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, in which he expressed their own opinions with great vigour, and informed the world that to them Ruskin seemed like a Luther of the Arts.

By the time that the whole work had been published, although, as the *Christian Observer* said, "no author in our time has at once excited more admiration, and yet been assailed with more censure than John Ruskin",<sup>4</sup> the general tone of the press was laudatory in the extreme. "A splendid rhapsody in human progress,"<sup>5</sup> *Fraser's* called the book: while the *Eclectic Review* announced: "He has out-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of James Smetham*, ed. Sarah Smetham and Wm. Davies (1892), pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Cross, *Life of George Eliot*, vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Review*, no. 98, March 1856, pp. 384 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Issue of September, 1852.

<sup>5</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1857.

lived and outwritten the obloquy and abuse that once assailed him, and while yet in the prime of life has attained the proud position of one of the greatest of all writers, living or dead, on the subject of art."<sup>1</sup> No less generous in its praises was the *Athenaeum*. "Our duty is to report that the work is well, admirably and nobly done," it declared. "In method, single, clear, and as a whole eloquent to a marvel, as the whole world knows; and taken in a mass, these five volumes contain the most valuable contributions to art-literature the language can show."<sup>2</sup>

Nor were his more faithful readers any less deeply impressed. "Ruskin's 'don't know' in the last volume about clouds, is very noble and manly after his 'spouterism' in the first volume of *Modern Painters* on the same subject," wrote Smetham to a friend. "There he spoke as if he had 'entered into the Springs of the Sea'; 'walked in search of the Depth'; 'seen the treasures of the Snow, the treasures of the Hail', and 'by which way the light is parted', and 'the way for the lightning of thunder', and knew whether the 'rain had a father, and who had begotten the drops of dew and had numbered the clouds of heaven'. I love him more for the subdued, reverential renunciatory tone of his last writings, which come not from less knowledge but more wisdom."<sup>3</sup>

For himself, Ruskin was more satisfied with the conclusion of his book than with the beginning. And to Sir John Naismith, who had written him a letter of congratulation, he replied: "I am grateful for encouragement, especially from people who can see the sort of work there is in the last things I have done: for nearly all people who care about me at all keep telling me there is nothing I do now like the first volume of *Modern Painters*—and I, who know that the first volume is hasty and ignorant, and the second spoiled by a well-meant but childish affection, and that there is five times the knowledge and twice the sincerity in the work I do now, am wearied at this, and sometimes feel as if it were no use to know things better than boys do—or to say them in plain English—some people like short sight and vapouring so much better."<sup>4</sup> But one of the most acute appreciations of Ruskin's art criticism was not to be written until nearly a quarter of a century after he was dead. "The whole of Ruskin's mode of investigation and teaching was scientific," wrote Greville MacDonald in his biography of his father. "It depended upon the accurate collection of predictable facts, the arranging of them in order and class, and the deduction therefrom of the laws governing their nature, their history, their influence. Nor was he the less scientific that he repudiated the academic folly of those wise men who go to sea in a bowl and think their meagre equipment will carry them safely across the ocean. Ruskin's mind went beyond the 'merely

<sup>1</sup> Issue of August 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Issue of 26.1.1856.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of James Smetham*, op. cit., pp. 113-14.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 11.4.1857: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 260.

rational horizon', and by the vision of categorical truth thus got was guided by a deeper understanding of facts and their laws, than is possible to a Darwin, a Huxley or a Metchnikoff. Indeed, so wide was his outlook that he learned the nature of man more from studying his relation to Art and Beauty, his duty towards his best possibilities in work, than from studying the facts of evolution. The tendency of Victorian science was to prove man a mechanism: whereas the whole of Ruskin's work went to show that this was precisely what he was not—and could not become, without disaster to soul and body, individual and race."<sup>1</sup>

## 5

But between the philosophy and the practice of art, there is a world of difference: and though Ruskin had adequate power to communicate to those who had minds to appreciate his rare and penetrating understanding, the genesis, the meaning and the function of fine art, he could not, any more than another, adequately explain the method of its actual structure. In the creation of all works of art, in no matter what sphere, there are two distinct processes: conception and expression; but whereas the process of conception is identical in each case, so that a great artist working in one medium can readily understand the same process taking place in the mind of an artist working in another—as Proust was able to apply to literature so many of the great laws Ruskin had deduced from painting—the actual process of expression is a mystery, personal and inexplicable, a strange and uncommunicable gift that can neither be taught nor copied. It was for this reason that so many artists who had read Ruskin's works with a profound and elated appreciation, ultimately became disillusioned when they struggled to practise what they believed to be his methods. Smetnam is an illuminating example of this process of disillusionment.

"I quite envy you your first reading of Ruskin," he wrote to a friend in 1873. "Ruskin is a revelation of a new world, and it only wants the remove of a century to show him in his colossal proportions . . . I do not think his theories of life will work, yet I do esteem him one of the very noblest creatures that ever breathed God's vital air; a man not a whit behind the Sir Philip Sidney and the *Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* who have cropped up like the flower which blooms once in a hundred years. I shan't soon forget the silent farms and solitary ways where I first drank in *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice* and *The Seven Lamps*, and would give a good deal to have it all again. . . ."

<sup>2</sup> A few years later, however, he was writing to his brother: "About 1849 I read Ruskin, and saw the logical and verbal

<sup>1</sup> Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (1924), p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of James Smetnam*, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

force of what he said, and determined to put it to the proof, painting several pictures in the severely imitation style, and deriving much of both profit and pleasure from it. After a fair trial I saw that words and pigments are not at all the same things. As he, after fifteen years' close study of painting, found his eyes opened to the Venetians, who upset half his former theories, so I by sheer experiment saw that the truth for the nineteenth century lay between Holman Hunt's work and Titian's work; that *absolute* imitation of nature with twelve pigments is simply impossible, that there was a flaw in the logic about 'resemblance to nature', that the true basis of a painting may be defined thus: 'the expression of the feeling of an individual man about nature, needing some good amount of culture on the part of the observer to understand his language', must therefore forever be laid open to endless varieties of opinion, being in fact a Fine (serial, attenuated, subtle, imponderable) Art. Then with much thankfulness to John Ruskin for his great services in so eloquently calling the attention of the British Public to the subject, and for many wonderful fruits of his own observations of nature and pictures, I retired once again into my own lines of operation, conscious of my position, and disabused of many early dreams of perfectibility and the public recognition of Art.

"Said J. R. in early days, 'any man with proper pains may arrive at perfectly certain judgments'. But at what expense? I ask. Look at the reply. 'For fifteen years I was blind to the greatest work of all, though daily and ardently engaged in close and profound study of this one thing.' What of the busy puisne judges and barristers? What of Sir Benjamin Brodie and his followers? What of the—the *anybody*, but the son of a wealthy merchant born with 'this art gift of mine', buttressed with money, emancipated by leisure, urged on by taste, and passionate desire for Turner's defence against a world of antagonists and depreciators, who had to be told by a knight on horseback that Turner was the greatest landscape painter the world ever saw! But to be *told* this is next to nothing, and the people who would not have bought a Turner in 1849 will now give £3,000 for one not intrinsically worth £500, and to them no more than a Creswick would be. They know no more of Turner now than in 1849. The conclusion of nearly thirty years' experience and gradual disenchantment has been that no one knows the difference between a moderately good picture with no glaring errors in it, and a transcendent picture, except artists themselves who are also producers."<sup>1</sup>

## 6

"There never was yet . . . isolation of a great spirit so utterly desolate . . ." wrote Ruskin of Turner in the final chapter of *Modern*

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

*Painters.* "My own admiration was wild in enthusiasm but it gave him no ray of pleasure; he could not make me at that time understand his main meanings; he loved me, but cared nothing for what I said, and was always trying to hinder me from writing because it gave pain to his fellow artists. . . . He knew that however little his higher power could be seen, he had at least done as much as ought to have saved him from wanton insult, and the attacks upon him in his later years were to him not merely contemptible in their ignorance, but amazing in their ingratitude."<sup>1</sup>

The completed *Modern Painters* marks the end of a phase and an epoch in Ruskin's life, just as it marks the end of his passionate allegiance to Turner. To the end of his days he was to remain interested in Turner, and in his old age he reverted to making a catalogue for the drawings and sketches in the National Gallery. But such activities were prompted chiefly by old associations and habits, and the "exquisite pleasure that every new acquisition used to give him", so that "it was like a year added to his life, and a permanent extension of the sphere of his life",<sup>2</sup> had vanished forever.

And while he still derived pleasure from his Turner drawings until the end of his life, his chief concern henceforward was to prevent, if possible, the master's works perishing from neglect. "You have never been able to understand my feeling about Turners," he was to write to his father from Mornex on 16 May, 1863. "I so little desire their possession that I would give every one I have to the National Gallery tomorrow if I thought they would be safe there. I desire their safety, as I desire that of Chartres Cathedral. I don't want to buy the Cathedral, but I want to be able to see it and to know it is safe."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, there was time to come when Ruskin realised that much of the significance he had seen in Turner had been created by his own imagination. "I wonder how much Shakespeare really meant of all that," Ruskin asked Maurice, one day years later, when they were both coming away from a Shakespearean lecture. "I suppose he meant at least more than we can follow, and not less," Maurice replied. "Well, that is what I used to think of Turner," Ruskin said sadly—"and now I don't know."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 452-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 16.5.1863: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 445.

<sup>4</sup> "John Ruskin", by Julia Wedgwood, *Contemporary Review*, March 1900, p. 339.





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# Book V

## The Bride of Lammermoor— 1860-1869

*. . . The great fiction of every human life is the shaping of its Love, with due prudence, due imagination, due persistence and perfection from the beginning of its story to the end—for every soul its Palladium. . . .*

RUSKIN: Fiction, Fair and Foul.

*. . . The callous indifference which pursues its own interests at any cost of life, though it does not definitely adopt the purpose of sin, is a state of mind at once more heinous and more hopeless than the wildest aberrations of ungoverned passion.*

RUSKIN.

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## Chapter I

1. *Lady Canning and Lady Waterford: introduction to Mrs. La Touche.* 2. *Mrs. La Touche: her literary aspirations: she writes to Ruskin: Ruskin meets Rose: visits to Denmark Hill: lessons in Mayfair.* 3. *Unconversion: the atmosphere of 1860: disgust and self-disappointment: melancholy: the birth of "Unto this Last".* 4. *Publication in the "Cornhill": public commotion: attacks upon Thackeray: Carlyle's approval.* 5. *The principles of "Unto this Last": relations between master and servant: the blighting force of competition: the function of the merchant: government and co-operation: wealth and value: profit: true life the only wealth.* 6. *Influence of the work.*

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I

AMONGST the great ladies acquainted with Ruskin were the two beautiful daughters of Lord Stuart de Rothesay. Both famous beauties in their day,—when they entered a ballroom together, every head would be turned in admiration—they had both made brilliant marriages; Louisa so captivating the "wild Lord Waterford" that he underwent a severe taming in order to obtain her for his wife; and Charlotte very soon becoming the celebrated Lady Canning, maid-in-waiting to Queen Victoria, and later, first Vicereine of India.

Both of the sisters had romantic and disappointing lives. Lady

Waterford, in the Irish riots of '48, had endured virtual imprisonment in her Irish home of Curraghmore, when the Fenians threatened to kidnap her if she ventured to go outside the park; Lady Canning, later, was to live through the terrible time of anxiety of the Indian mutiny. Lady Waterford soon lost her handsome, headstrong husband on the hunting field; while Lady Canning followed her husband to an early grave. Yet with all the distractions and inevitable duties of their great position, both sisters never lost their sincere devotion to art.

Lady Waterford's admiration for Ruskin had begun as early as 1842. "I am reading every book he ever wrote. I delight in him. They give me a new enjoyment of nature,"<sup>1</sup> she wrote on 25 March to Lady Jane Bouverie. A few years later her own work was receiving illustrious praise: "The Queen has written a very gracious and complimentary letter to Char. about my drawing," she told her mother in a letter dated 31 July, 1849. "I am flattered that it is approved of, but I know it is full of faults."<sup>2</sup>

The sisters probably met Ruskin, through the third Earl of Somers, who had known him up at Christ Church, during the period of his greatest interest in the Pre-Raphaelites: for it was he who sent them off to visit the studios of Rossetti and of Hunt. Hunt has told how the two great ladies came to see him unexpectedly one morning in the unfurnished and make-shift studio he was using between two of his trips abroad, and how they climbed upon rickety chairs and handled dusty canvases as though they had been used to such an environment all their lives. With Rossetti, it seems, Lady Waterford was as much charmed as was he with her. Enthusiastically he wrote to his mother on 1 July, 1855, that she would undoubtedly be a great painter, were she not such a great lady and such a "stunner";<sup>3</sup> while she was so enchanted with his water-colours that she even wished him to give her lessons at Ford Castle, which, at Brown's instigation, as we have seen, he had declined to do.

Even without his help, people found her drawings "quite lovely" and "indescribably beautiful"; and Lady Waterford soon fell back on the amiable and hard-pressed Ruskin after all. Lady Canning, away in India, sketching eagerly in the early morning, was "quite surprised at the wonderful beauty of detail—all the tangle, and great unbroken leaves, and creepers and stems (as she wrote home in her journal letter of 23 October, 1857), all lovely to draw, but a Ruskin-like artist would be wanted to do them justice"<sup>4</sup>—and hung her more successful efforts in the small drawing-room of Government House. Others she sent home to her sister for helpful criticism. "I had just got your portfolio back from Clanricarde when Ruskin came to

<sup>1</sup> A. J. C. Hare, *The Story of Two Noble Lives* (1893), vol. 1, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> A. J. C. Hare, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 116.

visit Somers," her mother informed her. "I hardly expected him to appreciate your bold flowers, and only showed him a few specimens, but he was in raptures, and said they were the grandest representations of flowers he had ever seen. . . . He had expended his admiration, I suppose, for when Somers showed his own exhibition, he was captious, and said: 'You copy nature too closely! It is the place itself! These are views, not pictures.'"<sup>1</sup> "He begs to be allowed to see some more of your flowers," Lady Stuart de Rothesay added a few days later, "and he mentions having got Lady Waterford's *Charity Girl* to look at—'She's stunning'. I told her this, and she hates the word so much, she would infinitely have preferred abuse."<sup>2</sup>

It was seldom Ruskin's habit to flatter his pupils, and when he censured her efforts Lady Waterford took his criticisms far more meekly than the lordly Rossetti. When, for example, in 1864, she was designing and painting frescoes for her village school (later a famous artist begged her to finish her rough sketches in order that "it may be known that we have to-day someone doing work as noble as any in mediaeval Venice"),<sup>3</sup> Ruskin had no hesitation in saying that he had expected to see something far better. But Lady Waterford simply wrote to a friend, "Ruskin condemned (very justly) my frescoes, and has certainly spirited me to do better,"<sup>4</sup> and to another, "I am getting on with a fresco which, thanks to Mr. Ruskin's useful critique, I am making of a much warmer colour".<sup>5</sup> When Ruskin failed to be pleased, the following summer, she wrote to Augustus Hare: "When Ruskin came here, he said I would never study or take pains: so I copied a print from Van Eyck in Indian ink: it took me several months. When I took Ruskin into my school, he only said: 'Well, I expected you would have done something better than that.'"<sup>6</sup>

In December 1866, she wrote again to Mrs. Bernal Osborne: "I have been with my nieces paying several visits to studios, and we had a charming afternoon at Denmark Hill with Mr. Ruskin, who showed us beautiful pictures, drawings, etc., read us some Chaucer and enchanted us all."<sup>7</sup>

To the end of her life, indeed, Lady Waterford (who with a friend did a set of illustrations for Rossetti's Christmas poems) was deeply influenced by Ruskin's works. Though he was himself "the reverse of the man I like, yet his intellectual part is quite my ideal",<sup>8</sup> she told Mrs. Bernal Osborne; and later admitted to the same friend: ". . . There is a charm in Ruskin's writing that I find in no other,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 281.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

though he often provokes me and I sometimes disagree: but he is right in saying all careless work is a proof of something morally wrong: I am sure nothing truer was ever said."<sup>1</sup>

Lady Waterford's reaction to Ruskin's teaching is significant, not only because she was one of many gifted and intelligent women who thought the same; but because her judgment was completely unbiassed by any professional considerations of gratitude or jealousy. "She was certainly the noblest woman I ever saw," Millais wrote of her later: while the praise of her friend Mrs. La Touche was even more enthusiastic. "She was a wonderful being. . . . She was the most unworldly woman I ever knew. I don't think she could even understand a worldly ambition or motive. She did not despise fashion . . . she simply ignored it. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin's relations with Lady Waterford continued until her death in 1891. They are typical of many such, and significant chiefly because she was the unwitting instrument of his greatest future pain. For it was through Lady Waterford that Ruskin first met Mrs. La Touche. That the two women were very close friends at the end of the 'fifties is clear from a letter which Lady Stuart de Rothesay sent in June 1857, to Lady Canning. "You ask about Loo's descent from her High Church. It came to me as a surprise, when we were abroad. I can trace it a little to the influence of Jane Ellice and her husband, and also to Mrs. La Touche. . . . People want to take possession of her, and I do not like her to be the victim of minds far inferior to her own!"<sup>3</sup>

## 2

Mrs. La Touche, of Harristown, was the daughter of Catherine, Countess of Desart, by her second husband, Lieutenant Roso Lambart Price, a gentleman whose family had settled in Cornwall in the eighteenth century, and had come from Jamaica, where they owned large estates. Half sister to the nobly handsome young Otway, Earl of Desart, whom Ruskin had known at Christ Church as a child and with whom she had been brought up at his seat in a wild, forest-covered stretch in the South of Ireland, she had once found herself, at a party, picked up and kissed by a nice old gentleman and lady, who seemed to her just like everybody else's uncle and aunt, but were in reality the King and Queen.

Intensely proud of her Celtic blood, she had early developed a passion for literature; and at the age of twelve had sent one of her compositions—a poem called *The Sea Men*—to a Brighton newspaper, which, to her immense delight, accepted and printed it. Thus, growing up with a mild talent for writing and sketching, she found

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Millais, *Life and Letters of Sir J. E. Millais* (1899), vol. 1, p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> A. J. C. Hare, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 476-7.

herself somewhat out of sympathy with the conventional fox-hunting society with whom she usually mixed, and was inclined to prefer books to horses and her paintbox to somewhat dreary calls upon the neighbours. In 1843, Maria Price had married John La Touche, member of a French family who had sought refuge in Ireland after the Edict of Nantes, where he fought for Dutch William at the Boyne, established a silk weaving factory in Dublin, and founded the La Touche Bank in Castle Street. Although, after her marriage, she inevitably became one of the social leaders of Co. Kildare, her intellectual pretensions still remained; and she amused her friends by calling large dinner parties "the vulgar outcome of one of Mrs. Grundy's principles, 'High living and low thinking'". Because she was a sociable woman with considerable charm, she soon established a reputation for being witty and intelligent. But although she spoke several languages, and read diversely, her real attitude to life was less cosmopolitan than provincial. A woman of undoubtedly attractive personality and address, Dr. Greville MacDonald, years later, remembered her as of "handsome and kindly presence, physically large and robust, with slightly protruding teeth which, as a boy, rather repelled him".

As a young woman, Mrs. La Touche had applied herself to the writing of novels, and published two in three volumes which nobody read. These works, one of which was called *The Clintons* and another *The Double Marriage*, which, as she herself wrote later to George MacDonald, were crude and melodramatic, were followed by long, unrhyming verses which must have been as embarrassing for her friends to read as were the unpublished novels so generously pressed upon her friends by Mme. Auberon. When literature failed to offer her the intellectual distinction which she desired, she gathered together Lady Drogheda, Lady Cloncurry and various other friends, and formed a society known as the Aletheme, whose members all rechristened themselves in classic style: her choice—Alethia—giving name to the exclusive circle. But Mrs. La Touche, much admired as she was by many friends (one of them has likened her letters to those of Mme. de Sévigné, and another pronounced her to have been "a woman of singular charm and gifts"), had not the personality or the natural distinction to support such a position; and the society presently died of philistine county ridicule. Nevertheless, Mrs. La Touche, a woman of dominating nature, and attainments which passed as brilliant in her circle of amateurs, continued to correspond at length with her conventional friends; and evidently to give them much pleasure by doing so. "How I wish you knew Mrs. La Touche," Lady Waterford wrote to Mrs. Bernal Osborne. "How you would enjoy her letters: here is a bit I thought so clever, which she wrote me lately—'Her outward life is very uncongenial to mine, and becomes more so every year. I feel as if I were a black beetle and she a great

blue dragonfly. She buzzes past one with a flash of colour and loud metallic hum, and I clap my two hard black wing-cases to my sides, and crouch in the shadow.' I think there is such fun and cleverness in that."<sup>1</sup> It was probably through Lady Waterford that Mrs. La Touche learned to admire Ruskin: it was certainly at her suggestion that, when she was anxious to find a drawing master for her children, who had been learning from Ruskin's *Elements*, she wrote to the author to ask his help.

It was Ruskin's custom, upon such occasions, to recommend his talented pupil of the Working Men's College: and, having received her letter early in 1858, he wrote to William Ward asking him to call at her town house in Great Cumberland Street. But evidently Mrs. La Touche considered Ward but a poor substitute for the master himself; and that autumn on his return from abroad, Ruskin received a second letter from her in which she declared that she realised that he himself was the only sound teacher of Art, and as she believed that her youngest daughter had particular gifts worth developing rightly, would he do her the inestimable favour of calling to see her himself?

With characteristic generosity, Ruskin agreed to go: and found Mrs. La Touche "the sort of person he expected, but a good deal more than he expected, and in all sorts of ways. Extremely pretty still, herself, nor at all too old to learn many things; but mainly anxious for her children."<sup>2</sup> Emily, the elder child, was out: but Rose—the one whom Mrs. La Touche thought might have exceptional talent, was upstairs in the nursery—should she be sent for? So long as it would not embarrass her, yes, Ruskin replied. And presently the door opened and Rose came in, walked gravely across to give him her hand, and then stood back, quietly waiting. She was a little girl of nine and a half, and rather shy. Ruskin stood and looked at her, noting with unconscious care the soft, deep blue of her eyes; the lips, slightly too wide and clearly outlined in front, but perfect in profile: the hair curling round the forehead and bound carefully at the back; the sweet, undistinguished features which he was never afterwards to forget.

So, for a half minute which seemed timeless, the two regarded each other gravely: the tall, slender, auburn-haired blue-stocked youthful-looking man of forty, and the silent, self-possessed beautiful Irish child of not yet ten: while Rose, who had heard so much of the distinguished visitor's greatness, and had expected him to be "something like Garibaldi, or the Elgin Theseus",<sup>3</sup> politely tried to disguise her disappointment at his appearance.

Then they discussed the question of Rose's drawing. It seemed,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 525.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 526.

certainly, that she might have talent: and Ruskin declared that it would give him pleasure to try to educate it to the best of his ability. But certainly he could not manage to go three times a week from Denmark Hill to Great Cumberland Street. What sort of a journey was it to Denmark Hill? Mrs. La Touche amiably enquired: and before Ruskin left it was arranged that the two girls should come with their mother for a lesson the following week.

Of course, on this great occasion, there was no official lesson. The visitors had to be introduced to Mrs. Ruskin; they had to see the family pictures; the garden; the farm; the orchard. With the same zeal with which he had done it so often for great ladies such as Lady Goderich or Lady Ashburton, or for poets such as Browning and Tennyson, Ruskin showed the Turners, the Prouts, the Hunts: now pointing out some special beauty of brushwork, now taking a drawing down to display some feature in the light. After this there were the minerals in his study to see: the peaches on the old fruit wall to admire: and the pigs to visit, who, it was observed, "were highly educated and spoke excellent Irish".<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, such a success was the visit that a few days later Mrs. La Touche sent Ruskin a long letter in her most "literary" manner to thank him for his kindness. "I have too long delayed, in my own name and in Rose's," she wrote, "for the pleasant hours we spent last Thursday. You who live with and for Art, will not easily guess how much enjoyment you afforded to me who am wholly unaccustomed to such an atmosphere—out of dreamland. The *Val d'Aosta* and the Rossetti and some of the Turners, have been before me ever since. Rose was very eloquent about them on the way home; she will not forget them, and will refer to them in memory hereafter with better understanding of their meaning.

"Altogether, we owe 'the immortal memory of one happy day' to Mrs. Ruskin's kindness and yours, and more beautiful than all past sunsets was that which we saw on our way home; it was the interpretation, or rather the Apotheosis, of one or two of the Turners you had shown me, one of those skies no one else ever attempted to paint, and under it this evil London glorified into a shadowy semblance of the New Jerusalem, a city of sapphire and gold."<sup>2</sup> Since there were several more pages in similar vein, it is evident that Mrs. La Touche was anxious to make a favourable impression.

A few days later, Mrs. La Touche and her two daughters came again, and lessons began "with perspective and the analysis of the essential qualities of triangles"<sup>3</sup> in true Ruskinian manner. But it was soon evident that between Mrs. La Touche's eloquent conversation, and all the prodigal diversions of Denmark Hill, the two children

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 527.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of a Noble Woman (Mrs. La Touche of Harristown)*, ed. Margaret Ferrier Young (1903), pp. 37-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Præterita: Works*, vol. 35, p. 527.



made but scant progress: for which reason Ruskin decided to give them additional lessons in their nursery in Great Cumberland Street whenever he happened to be in town. Thus, in a surprisingly short time, Ruskin found himself on terms of affectionate intimacy both with the mother and her two daughters. Mrs. La Touche, who had been christened by one of her friends "Lacerta"—to signify that she had the grace and wisdom of the serpent, without its poison—soon became known as "Laccy"; while Rose, who had already christened her governess "Bun", decided that Ruskin would be better known as Crumpet—which, along with various other pet names, was later elaborated into St. Crumpet, and finally diminished to St. C.: initials which were to stand also for the St. Chrysostom which he was soon to be called by others.

Meanwhile, both Emily and Rose made such progress in their drawing and painting, that Ruskin found himself more and more often in the neighbourhood of Great Cumberland Street. So that when spring came, and it was decided that the family should go to Florence, his one consolation was that Rose not only seemed sorry to go away, but that she seemed perfectly to understand how sorry he was at her going.

He wrote her numerous letters, and, when abroad, composed for her charming, affectionate, descriptive verses of his travels, which began, "Rosie, Rosie, Rosie rare", or "Rosie, pet, and Rosie, puss", and "Good-night, Rosie, Rosie, puss". But, besides such frivolous offerings, Ruskin also determined, to his own parents' immense surprise, to teach her Greek, so that, if a Christian, she could read her Bible with complete understanding; if a pagan, appreciate the greatest literature that has been given to mankind. "I have warned her against 'smattering' either of that or anything else. . . . To have learned one Greek verb accurately will make a difference in her habits of thought for ever after. She is taken great care of as regards overwork, and as long as she can leap ten feet with a short run, she will do well enough. . . ."<sup>1</sup> He occasionally received from Rose a long letter in return. "Yes, write packets—trunks, and we shall like them so much," she wrote as a postscript to her first letter. "Indeed I couldn't write before, I'll try to write again. You *must* see how we think of you and talk of you—Rosie posie."<sup>2</sup> "For from this time," as he was to write later, "a new epoch of life began for him in this wise—that his father and mother could travel with him no more, but Rose, in heart, was with him always, and all he did was for her sake."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 12.10.1861: *Works*, vol. 35, pp. lxvi–lxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Praeterita*: *Works*, vol. 35, p. 532.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 533.

## 3

Externally, there had been little apparent change in Ruskin's life during the last few years. Yet gradually his fundamental ideas were developing: his prejudices undergoing drastic change. Experience and thought were slowly emancipating him from the narrow and intolerant religious beliefs he had as a youth accepted without question from his mother. At Turin, indeed, in 1858, where he had discovered that to dine well to the music of a band, and watch the elegantly dressed women in the square, could be quite an agreeable diversion; and that "a good stout, self-commanding, magnificent Animality was the make for poets and artists"; he suddenly found himself "unconverted from his old Evangelical faith". While attending service in the Waldenstein chapel "a little squeaking idiot was preaching to an audience of seventeen old women and three louts that they were the only children of God in Turin; and that all the people in Turin outside the chapel, and all the people in the world out of sight of Monte Veso would be damned".<sup>1</sup> In a flash he realised the thing as being symptomatic of a state of mind—the most deathly, unproductive and contemptible of which humanity is capable—a state of mind in which many of those he knew daily fed their diseased and monstrous pride upon a formula which could be relied upon as a solid rock to preserve their self-complacency and their self-esteem. It is one of the most curious phenomena of human psychology how quite gifted and thoughtful people, when under the influence of an emotional religious feeling, are invariably able to justify an exclusiveness which places themselves in a gratifying circle of the elect, and the great majority who do not believe with them in another incontiguous circle of the damned. Dogmatic Christianity, which has been compelled to change its attitude to many points of orthodoxy during the past hundred years, had reached, about 1860, a degree of intolerance which was intensified by fear of the rapid advance of scientific knowledge; and particularly baneful in effect was the doctrine taught by the extreme Evangelicals that eternal salvation depended solely upon faith. Not only did it tolerate, and even justify, the millions who, top-hatted, filled the churches on Sunday, while on weekdays they continued to live precisely as they wished; but it drove from the Church thousands of thoughtful persons who were not prepared to countenance a manifest delusion.

This defection was considerably hastened by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, of Bishop Colenso's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, which appeared in 1861; and by the publication of his *Critical Examination of the Pentateuch* which began in 1862, and for which the author was deposed and excommunicated by the Church in 1863. Many years before, F. D. Maurice had been

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera* (Letter 76): *Works*, vol. 29, p. 89.

asked to resign from his chair at University College for holding unorthodox views upon the subject of eternal damnation: and in 1862 both Wilson and Williams were prosecuted by the ecclesiastical authorities for a denial of the same doctrine.

This ferment in the sphere of religious thought was even exceeded by the ferment in world politics during the next five years. 1859 had seen the beginning of the Franco-Sardinian war with Austria: 1860 the beginnings of the Franco-British expeditions in China and Japan. 1864 inaugurated the Polish-Russian war and the troubles in Circassia. The American Civil War raged from 1861 to 1865, and serfdom in Russia, and slavery in America, were coming to an end. In England, the political scene was dominated by the death of the Prince Consort on 15 December, 1861. "I am overwhelmed by this incalculable affliction which has fallen on us all," Lady Eastlake recorded upon the day of the event. "I had buoyed myself up with hope, and this morning's letter from my dear husband gave me further hope; but at church the omission of that honoured name—no longer needing earthly intercession—awoke the congregation to the truth, and the sensation was painful in the extreme. Alas! that Royal Widow indeed needs all her people's prayers."<sup>1</sup> "Everything is now changed and changing with furious rapidity in this country,—principally owing to the railways, I think," Carlyle had written to his brother Alexander a few years before. "A great increase of luxury is coming over all ranks; prices of everything very nearly doubled (13d. per pound for butter, 1d. each for eggs, and all in proportion)."<sup>2</sup>

By 1860, indeed, with the general function of railways, steamships, and other scientific inventions, England had become an industrial, rather than an agricultural, country, with a population that tended more and more to congregate and to fester in the large, ill planned, sooty and dismal manufacturing towns such as Sheffield, Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Oldham, Hull, Bradford and Leeds, which had all sprung up during the previous half century. The most influential class in the community was no longer the aristocracy, but the rich upper middle class of tradesmen and manufacturers who lived in the new, fashionable houses fast being built round Hyde Park, who sent their sons to be broken in at the new public schools, and whose great aim in life was the accumulation of property. Property, indeed, to the readers of *The Times* in 1860, was considered a great deal more important than life. A man would be let off with only a few months' imprisonment for the most brutal assault upon a woman, while petty theft was punished with merciless rigour. By now Money had become the great god of the nation; and the greatest crime a man could commit was to be poor. To be poor meant to be an outsider, a failure—to be poor meant to be fit for nothing but the scrap heap.

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, ed. C. E. Smith, vol. 2, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. A. Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 182.

"While we have meetings perpetually held, and innumerable writings put forth to promote education and raise the moral standard of the people, we are horrified and alarmed day after day by accounts of the most frightful murders, colossal frauds, and crimes of every description,"<sup>1</sup> Henry Greville recorded in his diary in 1856: and, indeed, Reform Bills, poor laws and factory acts had done as yet but little to mitigate the squalor and chaos produced by the combination of the extensive use of the machine, and the universal economic cult of *laissez faire*. Yet already, even in a century of unparalleled prosperity, the sinister shadow of trade depression had fallen upon a surprised and troubled world.

"There is a good deal of uneasiness in the financial and commercial world and no confidence," Greville noted on 17 November, 1857. "The very prudence of the trading community in arresting the course of production is becoming a source of distress, for already vast numbers of people are out of employment, or working short time with reduced wages. The prices of everything are falling, consumption will be diminished, and the revenue will be diminished likewise, while our expenses cannot but be increased by the war."<sup>2</sup>

Sensitive as he was to every current in the external world, as in the world of ideas, it was not external events which were solely cause of the state of profound melancholy and dissatisfaction which settled upon Ruskin towards the end of 1860. The causes of this, indeed, were diverse, subtle, and interpenetrating. To begin with, the completion of a book which had been in his mind, and absorbed his greatest energies, for nearly twenty years, left him in the condition of uncertainty and apparent purposelessness which comes to every thoughtful man who suddenly reaches the end of a work which has for long absorbed him, without having any specific new task to which to devote himself. Secondly, there can be no question that continued concentration over a long period had steadily impaired his powers of resistance, until now he was suffering from complete physical exhaustion. For long he had complained of a series of coughs and colds, and it is not improbable that he was suffering from some undetected recrudescence of tubercular activity. But the two most powerful contributing factors were, undoubtedly, as will be seen, the sense of his own failure, and the frustration of all his attempts to escape from a parental domination which had now become more than he could bear. "I don't say I wouldn't care for reputation if I had it," he had told Furnivall in 1854, "but until people are ready to receive all I say about art as 'unquestionable', just as they receive what Faraday tells them about chemistry, I don't consider myself to have any reputation at all worth caring about."<sup>3</sup> "Criticism," said Dr. Johnson, "though

<sup>1</sup> *Greville Memoirs*, ed. H. Reeve (23.11.1856), vol. 8, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 9.6.1854: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 169.

dignified from the earliest ages by the labours of men eminent for knowledge and sagacity, and since the revival of polite literature the favourite study of European scholars, has not yet attained the certainty and stability of science." But Ruskin believed that true aesthetic criticism was based upon exact laws which could be determined only after prolonged efforts such as he had made; and felt that years of education and specialised experience gave him a right to have his opinions considered as infallible. Moreover, and what was infinitely more painful, he had come to realise at last that he was but an artist *manqué*; just as, many years ago, he had been forced to realise himself to be a poet *manqué*.

Undoubtedly this second realisation, unalleviated by the sense that he had another true vocation, was infinitely more bitter than the first. While added to all this was the continually heightening sense of being compelled by external necessities to devote himself to the betterment of a world that obstinately refused all intelligent help. "I live the life of an old lady in a houseful of wicked children," he had written to Mrs. Browning on 15 January, 1859—"can do nothing but cry out—they won't leave me to my knitting needles a moment. And this working in a way contrary to one's whole nature tells upon one at last—people never were meant to do it."<sup>1</sup>

"My opinion of my drawing is not morbid," he wrote to his father when he tried to reassure him in his depression. "It is the same fixed opinion which I have formed of my poetry, and will never more change, being grounded on clear and large knowledge of what is really noble and good in human work. I would I could lose the knowledge again, for it is an awful one, making the common world and its ways look half death and half dust; but as I have wrought for it, and this is all I have got for my labour, I suppose it will be of some use in time. My drawing may perhaps still be of use to me in illustrating natural history, or such things."<sup>2</sup>

It was to Mr. and Mrs. Browning that he had written, after a visit to Spurgeon in March 1858, that most churches were in a sad way because they all kept preaching the wrong way upwards, and said "Know and ye shall do" instead of "Do and you shall know". "As I read the Bible," he told her, "my main result in a way of belief is that those people are to be exalted in eternity who in this life have striven to do God's will and not their own. And so very few people appear to me to do this in reality that I don't know what to believe—the truth as far as I can make it out seems too terrible to be the truth. All churches seem to me mere forms of idolatry. A Roman Catholic idolizes his saint and his relic—an English High Churchman idolizes his propriety and his family pew—a Scotch Presbyterian idolizes his own obstinacy and his own opinions—a German divine idolizes his

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 15.1.1859: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 26.7.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 376.

dreams, and an English one his pronunciation;—and all their mistakes, and all their successes and rightnesses, are so shabby and slight and absurd, and pitiable and paltry, and so much dependent on early education—no—early teaching of prejudices, and on the state of their stomachs in after life—and of the weather, that I can't conceive any great Spirit's ordering them either into hell or heaven for anything of the kind; their beliefs and disbeliefs seem to me one worth about as much as the other, their doings and shortcomings alike blind and ridiculous—not by any means worth being damned for. It always haunts and forces itself upon me that the Creator's voice to them is always, 'You poor little, dusty, cobwebby creatures, go and lie down in your graves, and be thankful you come to any sort of end at last'. I am very ready to accept the notion of their immortality, but it seems to me just as *natural* to expect the immortality of the bloom on a plum and to talk of the little blue creatures that make it up being made Kings and Priests, as of our being made so."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it is clear that religious doubts had been long in his mind when he wrote to Dr. John Brown from Lausanne, on 6 August, 1860: "I am more tired out than the bulk of that last volume would apparently justify, but not half the work I did is in it. I cut away half of what I had written, as I threw it into the final form, thinking the book would be too big; and half or nearly half of the drawings were left unfinished, the engraver not having time to do them. There are only three etchings of mine in the book, but I did seven, of which one was spoiled in biting, three in mezzotinting, so that I was fairly knocked up when I got the last sheet corrected."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin had made his last tour with his parents, in Germany, the previous year; chiefly because he had been obliged to admit to the Chairman of the National Gallery Site Commission in 1857 that he was unacquainted with the picture galleries at Munich and Dresden. Henceforward all his journeyings were made alone.

In 1860, he had chosen once more his beloved Chamouni for a place of rest. "I believe Mr. Ruskin is only going to Switzerland for the summer," Lady Trevelyan had written to W. B. Scott the previous May. "He will never go away for a very long period while his father and mother are living. He has always said that but for them he would go and live in some favourite place in Switzerland."<sup>3</sup> In such a favourite place, Ruskin spent the summer with W. J. Stillman, the huge, blond young American painter interested in the Pre-Raphaelites, who later became a journalist and advised Rossetti to take chloral for his insomnia. "More princely hospitality than his no man ever received, nor more kindly companionship,"<sup>4</sup> he wrote later of this time. Together the two men argued upon art, went out sketching,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 29.3.1858: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 6.8.1860: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of W. B. Scott*, ed. W. Minto (1892), vol. 2, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Stillman, *Autobiography of a Journalist*, vol. 1, p. 264.

scaled the mountain peaks, or played chess till the small hours. While on Sunday they discussed Sabbatarianism, and Ruskin became more than ever confirmed in his reaction against Evangelicalism. But though (as he told C. E. Norton) Ruskin found Stillman "a very noble fellow—if only he could see a crow without wanting to shoot it to pieces",<sup>1</sup> he was furious when, having put him to draw some huts at the Perte du Rhone, he returned later to find a "careless and slipshod sketch (as Stillman later called it), not worth the paper it was on".<sup>2</sup>

In the intervals of companionship, Ruskin drew Alpine leaves and roses, and meditated long upon the papers he was now writing, which were later gathered together in the volume—perhaps the volume by which one day he will be best remembered—entitled *Unto this Last*.

## 4

Although well-nigh exhausted by his previous labours, it appeared to the industrious author scarcely more than a trifle now to contribute a series of essays upon a subject which had long occupied his thoughts. In the *Seven Lamps*, in *The Stones of Venice*, in *A Joy for Ever*, and in the concluding parts of *Modern Painters*, the subject of the workman, and the position he should occupy in a well-conducted state, and the degraded position he occupied in contemporary society—the subject of politics, in short, had increasingly absorbed his attention.

As early as April 1856, he had written very pertinently to Henry Acland, who was urging him not to waste his time and his energies upon a new field of study of which he could know but little: "I am forced by precisely the same instinct to the consideration of political questions that urges me to examine the laws of architectural or mountain forms. I cannot help doing so. . . . I am perfectly honest in all my purposes. . . . I am wholly unambitious. I don't mean I am not vain—that is, fond of praise, I am intensely fond of it, and very much pained by blame. But I don't care for *Power* unless it be to be useful with; the mere feeling of power and responsibility is a bore to me, and I would give any amount of authority for a few hours' peace. . . . I have perfect leisure for enquiry into whatever I want to know. I am untroubled by any sort of care or anxiety, unconnected with any particular interest or group of persons, unaffected by feelings of Party, of Race, of social partialities, or of early prejudice, having been bred a Tory—and gradually developed myself into an indescribable thing, certainly not a Tory. . . . Lastly, I have respect for religion, and accept the practical precepts of the Bible to their full extent. . . . I know the laws of work. . . . Against the charge, 'You live out of the world and cannot know *anything* about it'—who

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 6.8.1860: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Stillman, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 260.



XXI. LADY CANNING  
First Vicereine of India  
*From a photograph*





XXII. LOUISA MARCHIONESS OF WATERFORD

*From a sketch by Sir J. Leslie*

do you suppose knows more about the Lake of Geneva—I or the fish in it?”<sup>1</sup>

The first of his essays upon Political Economy Ruskin sent to the literary adviser of Smith, Elder & Co., asking him to insert it in their own magazine, *The Cornhill*, somehow, even if it meant “stigmatizing it with notes of reprobation”.<sup>2</sup>

The *Cornhill*, the latest magazine of any literary importance to be published, had been launched by Smith, Elder & Co., under the editorship of Thackeray, at the beginning of the year. Trollope had been offered £1,000, the previous autumn, for the copyright of a new novel, and had submitted *Framley Parsonage*, which was serialised with illustrations by Millais; and Sir Charles Taylor, Robert Bell, G. H. Lewes, Frederick Leighton, George MacDonald and Monckton-Milnes had all been invited to contribute. This magazine, which, as the embarrassed Thackeray (who always used to say that the difficulty of rejecting the contributions of his friends was the thorn in his pillow) wrote to Mrs. Browning when he rejected her poem *Lord Walter's Wife* (“for indecency”, as she told her sister-in-law,) was intended “not only for men and women, but for boys and girls, infants, sucklings almost . . . and there are things my squeamish public will not hear on Monday, though on Sunday they listen to them without a scruple”, and was scarcely the place for Ruskin's passionate and revolutionary ideas upon Political Economy. But doubtless both Thackeray and the proprietors of the magazine were only too glad to have the benefit of so distinguished a name amongst their list of contributors—even though the author did sign his initials only: and three papers appeared in the numbers for August, September and October.

Before publication, Ruskin had sent his father his first paper, telling him that he need not submit it to Smith and Elder's unless he fully approved; but although John James begged his son to spare his brain and write nothing for a year or two, and would have “preferred him not meddling with Political Economy for a while”, as they might “mistake him for a Socialist—or Louis Blanc, or Mr. Owen of Lanark”,<sup>3</sup> feared that “the wrath of the Manchester School would be delivered in worse terms than the anger of certain schools of painting”,<sup>4</sup> and confessed that he had suffered more uneasiness about John's newspaper letters on Politics and his papers on Political Economy than about all his books—he himself considered that the papers were “not bad”, and thought it would be rather amusing to see the commotion they would make.

Commotion, indeed, there very soon was. The *Literary Gazette* remarked that Ruskin's papers were one of the most melancholy

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 27.4.1856: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 238-9.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ruskin, *Letters on Art and Literature*, ed. T. J. Wise (1894), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 21.8.1860: *Works*, vol. 17, p. xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 25.10.1860: *Works*, vol. 17, p. xxvii.

spectacles, intellectually speaking, that they had ever witnessed. Another critic found the series of papers in the *Cornhill Magazine*, throughout which Mr. Ruskin laboured hard to destroy his reputation, to his mind most painful, and declared that it was no pleasure to see genius mistaking its power and rendering itself ridiculous. While the *Saturday Review* amused its readers with expressions such as "eruptions of windy hysterics", "utter imbecility", "intolerable twaddle"; and averred that the author was "a perfect paragon of blubbering", that "his whims and snivels" were "contemptible", and that "the world was not going to be preached to death by a mad governess".<sup>1</sup> These effusions were soon followed by attacks upon the editor of the magazine. The *Manchester Examiner and Times* could not imagine what inscrutable reason had made Thackeray publish such stuff; and the *Scotsman* considered that he should feel ashamed to print such frenzies.

"I'm so glad you like the economy papers," Ruskin wrote to William Ward on 1 October. "The next will be a smasher. I'm only afraid they won't put it in. If they don't, I'll print it separate."<sup>2</sup> Ruskin's worst forebodings, like those of his father, were shortly to be realised. Mr. George Smith felt that "the papers were too deeply tainted with socialistic heresy to conciliate subscribers",<sup>3</sup> and decided that so dangerous an experiment must be stopped. Thus Ruskin, by now a man of considerable distinction, was presently confronted with the rejection of his fourth paper. Thackeray was profusely apologetic, and tactfully sugared the pill as well as he could. But it was a very bitter pill for Ruskin to have to swallow; particularly as personal friends such as Dr. John Brown, and his old tutor, the Rev. Walter Brown, also expressed their disapproval in no uncertain terms.

Alone of all his friends Carlyle voiced unqualified approval. "You go down through those unfortunate dismal science people like a treble X of Senna, Glauber and Aloes," he wrote; "like a fit of British Cholera, threatening to be fatal! I have read your paper with exhilaration, exultation, often with laughter, with bravissimo! Such a thing flung suddenly into half a million dull British heads on the same day, will do a great deal of good. I marvel in parts at the lynx-eyed sharpness of your logic, at the pincer-grip (red-hot pincers) you take of certain bloated cheeks and blown-up bellies. More power to your elbow (though it is cruel in the extreme). . . ."<sup>4</sup>

"His wild words will touch the spring of action in some hearts, and ere we are aware, a moral floodgate may fly open and drown us all."<sup>5</sup> Such were the fears of the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, at a

<sup>1</sup> Issues of 4.8.1860 and 10.11.1860.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from Ruskin to William Ward* (privately printed, 1893), Letter no. 23, of 1.10.1860: vol. 1, pp. 50-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, pp. xxviii-xxix.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 29.10.1860, quoted in *English Illustrated Magazine*, November 1891.

<sup>5</sup> Issue of 2.10.1860.

period when to be labelled "socialist" in England had as much opprobrium attached to it as there was in being labelled "bolshivist" in the U.S.A. in 1920.

## 5

Yet most of the ideas expressed in *Unto this Last* have, through gradual assimilation into contemporary thought, and their reformulation and reiteration by such great disciples as Morris and Tolstoy, become so familiar that to-day it is those who, in principle, disagree with them that are generally considered to be in a contemptible minority. For in *Unto this Last* Ruskin first enunciated those principles which it has taken two world wars, with a quarter of a century's interval of suspended war between, to prove to be true beyond all doubt.

The generally accepted theories of political economy in 1860 were those of the Manchester School, led by Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, which had been erected partly upon abstract theory, and partly upon the distorted observation of contemporary facts, and which all upheld the great superstition of *laissez faire*. Only permit the most ruthless competition in production and distribution, and forbid State intervention of any kind in the sphere of commerce and manufacture, and the wealth of the nation must inevitably increase. For the wealth of the nation, to these gentlemen, simply consisted of the aggregate of private fortunes; and in their view, providing the total income of the population was greater, a country was more prosperous if it had a small number of plutocrats and a vast number of starving paupers, than if it had a large population of prosperous workers, and fewer of the very rich. Their principles were based on an entity called the "economic man"—an imaginary invention completely devoid of all humanity: and laws affecting this economic man were elaborately formulated with the naive idea that they had some practical significance. This was the first and most vital point of Ruskin's attack. For just as, at the conclusion of *Anna Karenina*, Levin realises that, as you can't treat bees without care, and expect to get satisfactory results, so you can't treat men without love (the writing of which very passage was probably influenced by the reading of *Unto this Last*), so Ruskin's first contention is that it is only a pseudo-science of political economy which can possibly imagine that any satisfactory code of social action can be determined without taking into account the influence of social affection. If man is a thinking reed, he is also a feeling one: and the idea that his emotions can be separated from his economic activities is as stupid as it is injurious and false. It may be logical to suppose that because the interests of two men are antagonistic, so must their attitude be to each other; but nevertheless it is untrue: they may, or may be not,

antagonistic in accordance with circumstances of the case. Indeed, since men are neither rats nor swine but human beings, there are even occasions when an antagonism of interests is effaced by the natural affections, as when, for example, a wounded soldier upon the battlefield gives to a dying man the water he needs so badly for himself.

This can be very simply understood in the relations between master and servant. According to the so-called laws of established political economy, the greater the amount of work that can be obtained from the servant, the greater the benefit to the community, and, through the community, to the servant himself. This law, however, could apply only if the servant were an engine worked by a motive power whose force could be exactly calculated. But since man is in reality an engine whose motive power is his soul, this unknown quantity—the soul—enters into all the political economist's equations, unknown to him, and falsifies each of his results. "The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay, or under pressure, or by help of any kind of fuel which may be supplied by the chaldron. It will be done only when the motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel: namely, by the affections."<sup>1</sup> You can employ any form of bribery or coercion upon a servant that you will, but perfect service is to be obtained only as the result of liking and goodwill. This implies the reciprocal goodwill and liking of the master; without this natural interchange of affection, a proper master-servant relationship cannot exist. And so in every other sphere of labour. It is only the theoretician, without practical experience of men, who can suppose that the maximum effort can ever be achieved without a voluntary and naturally evoked decision from the parties concerned.

The second fundamental error that Ruskin attacks is the principle that it is beneficial to society that wages should be competitive and governed by supply and demand. "We do not sell our prime-minister-ship by Dutch auction: nor, on the decease of a bishop, whatever may be the general advantage of simony, do we (yet) offer his diocese to the clergyman who will take the episcopacy at the lowest contract. We (with exquisite sagacity of political economy!) do indeed sell commissions; but not openly, generalships: sick, we do not enquire for a physician who takes less than a guinea; litigious, we never think of reducing six-and-eightpence to four and sixpence; caught in a shower, we do not canvass the cabmen, to find one who values his driving at less than sixpence a mile."<sup>2</sup> And although in all these cases the rate of payment depends to a large extent on the capacity required for the work, and the number of candidates available for the office, just as professional skilled labour has always received a stand-

<sup>1</sup> *Unto This Last: Works*, vol. 17, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 33.

ardised wage, so should all other labour also. It may at first sight seem strange to advocate the payment of good and bad workmen alike, but the relative importance in skill of bishop and physician is far greater than that of bricklaying: and just as we give careful choice to the one, so ought we to give careful choice to the other. For the natural and right system respecting all labour is that it should be paid at a fixed rate, but the good workman should be employed, and the bad workman unemployed; and not that the bad workman should be allowed to offer his work at half-price, and so supplant the good, or else force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum.

Having thus dealt with the workman, Ruskin passes next to the merchant or manufacturer, whose true business in the State, as the soldier's is to defend it, the pastor's to teach it, the physician's to keep it in health, and the lawyer's to enforce justice in it, is to provide for it. And here he concludes that in a true system of political economy, contrary to buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, the merchant would rather produce the best possible wares and distribute them at the cheapest price possible where they are most needed. Such a merchant would also rather die than consent to any adulteration in his products, or to an excessive price being charged for them. He would treat his men as though they were his sons, and in times of commercial crisis and distress he would not only share such suffering as this entails with his men, but even be prepared himself to bear the greater part of it.

With regard to the understanding of true political economy as it affects the State, it is first of all necessary to understand that one class, or one man, can be wealthy in the sense generally used, only at the expense of another. The power of a well filled purse necessarily depends upon a number of empty pockets—and the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor.

But true political economy considers the wellbeing of the individual only with reference to all individuals, and consists in the production, preservation and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things.

The art of becoming rich, in the common sense, can best be stated in accurate terms as the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour. Such inequality cannot be shown in the abstract to be either advantageous or disadvantageous to the body of the nation: and in the rash and absurd assumption that such inequalities are necessarily advantageous, lies the root of most of the popular fallacies on the subject. For the true advantage of any such inequality can depend only upon the methods by which it was accomplished and the purposes to which it is applied. Such inequalities, unjustly established, injure the nation both during their establishment and during their

existence; but justly established, benefit the nation in the course of their establishment, and, if nobly used, even more in their existence. "That is to say, among every active and well governed people, the various strength of individuals, tested by full exertion and specially applied to various need, issues in unequal, but harmonious results, receiving reward or authority according to its class and service, while, in the inactive or ill-governed nation, the gradations of decay and the victories of treason work out also their own rugged system of subjection and success; and substitute, for the melodious inequalities of concurrent power, the iniquitous dominances and depressions of guilt and misfortune."<sup>1</sup>

For the wealth of a state can consist, ultimately, only in the individuals who comprise the state; and the true political economy is that which produces the maximum number of human creatures developed in the highest degree in all their faculties of body, mind and heart.

In a well administered state, the payment of labour would accord with laws of strict justice. The payment of wages in money consists in a promise to some person working for us, that for the time and labour he spends in our service to-day, we will procure equivalent labour for him at any future time when he may require it. If we promise to give him less labour than he has given us, we under-pay him: if more, we over-pay him. Thus, according to the laws of supply and demand, when the number of labourers exceeds the amount of work required, they are under-paid: and when the amount of work required exceeds the number of labourers available, they are over-paid. And both these conditions are equally injurious to the true wealth of the nation.

Government and co-operation are in all things the Laws of Life; Anarchy and competition the laws of death: this is the fundamental principle of Ruskinian political economy. But while Ruskin was anxious that every man should possess such property as is necessary to him, he by no means believed in equality of wealth. What he wished to be clearly understood was that the rich have no more right to the property of the poor than, as it was universally accepted, the poor had to the property of the rich. The general acceptance of the current doctrine of political economy as a science Ruskin considered more disgraceful to the human intellect than anything else in history; and passionately he declared that he knew of no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion.

But Ruskin's contribution to political economy was as logical as it was humanistic. He demolished the generally, but vaguely, used terms such as Value, Wealth, Price and Produce, and clearly showed that Mill's arbitrary distinction between productive and unproduct-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 47.

ive labour was fallacious. Value, says Mill, in political economy, always means value in exchange. Thus, if two ships cannot exchange their rudders, says Ruskin, in one of his brilliant "*reductiones ad absurdum*", their rudders are, in politico-economic language, of no value to either. Wealth, says Mill, consists of all useful and agreeable objects which possess exchange value. But having previously set aside all moral and humanistic considerations, he fails to see that there can therefore be no criterion of either the agreeable or the useful.

Etymologically, says Ruskin, value derives from the word *valere*, to be well or strong in life, or valiant. To be valuable means therefore to avail towards life. "The real science of political economy, which has yet to be distinguished from the bastard science, as medicine from witchcraft, and astronomy from astrology, is that which teaches nations to desire and labour for the things that lead to life: and which teaches them to scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction."<sup>1</sup> To distinguish between the relative importance of pieces of glittering stone cut into pretty shapes, and such beneficent things as air, light and cleanliness: to discriminate between the vanity of useless luxury and the emotional and moral conditions which contribute to the state of true life—this alone is the function of true political economy. For possession is not an absolute, but a graduated power; and it is only with the faculties of awareness and appreciation, or through capacity, that any object can possess wealth for the individual man. Merely to own is to have and have not. True wealth is that which can be wisely used and fully valued. Thus material value can become wealth only in conjunction with developed character. Without such character and right governance and wise direction most so-called wealth rapidly becomes illth. Such governance and direction are impossible in a community whose political-economic laws are governed by ruthless competition—when it is not only the industrious, the methodical and the sensible, but also the covetous, unimaginative, insensitive and ignorant who become rich; and not only the foolish, the idle, the reckless, the improvident and the wicked, but also the entirely wise, the thoughtful, the sensitive, the imaginative, the well informed, and the entirely merciful, just and godly, who become poor.

The idea that profit to a state can arise from any activities of exchange is as fallacious as that the wealth of an object can be dissociated from its effect. Profit in this sense can mean merely a gain upon one side with a corresponding loss upon the other, and true material gain is attainable only by construction or discovery. The true price of anything, irrespective of its value, can be assessed by a ratio between the quantity of labour the purchaser can afford to obtain a thing, and the quantity of labour the seller can afford to keep it, combined with the relative desires to purchase or to keep on

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 85.



either side. For which reason, phenomena of price are extremely complex, and usually independent of essential value.

Even the term labour itself requires an exact definition. Ruskin calls it "the contest of the life of man with an opposite;—the term 'life' including his intellect, soul, and physical power, contending with question, difficulty, trial or material force".<sup>1</sup> Labour also can be of varying quality, the best labour being the most developed and harmonious combination of intellect, feeling, and controlled physical power; the worst, when all the faculties function at their most mechanical. And just as labour is various in quality, so is it diverse in aim; and can be divided, like material objects, into that which produces life, and that which produces death. Labour directed to the ends of death, whether consciously or unconsciously, impoverishes a nation. Its wealth can be increased only by labour wisely directed to production, distribution and consumption: wise consumption—to use everything, and to use it nobly, whether it be substance, service, or service perfecting substance—being the ultimate end of all true political economy. It is therefore the manner and result of consumption which is the true test of production. Production does not consist in things laboriously made, but in things serviceably consumable; and the question for the nation is not how much labour it employs, but how much life it produces. For just as consumption is the end and aim of production, so life is the end and aim of consumption. Life—true life—is the only wealth; and that country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings, just as that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others. A country's primary need is of people who, "leaving Heaven to decide whether they are to rise in the world, have resolved to seek, not greater wealth, but simpler pleasure; not higher fortune, but deeper felicity; making the first of possessions, self-possession, and honouring themselves in the harmless pride and calm pursuits of peace".<sup>2</sup>

Political economy, finally, to be a true science, must first consider the true, and not the illusory, welfare of the people who constitute the nation. As for the individual, it is necessary that he should always remember the inevitable fact that one man can possess only at the expense of another, and that to reduce his wants and do for himself as much as he can is his inevitable duty. For though in a beneficent state of society innocent luxury is possible for all; under present conditions, when even the cruellest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold, it is possible only for the ignorant.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, pp. 94–5.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 112.

Such were the salient ideas which, in 1860, aroused so much agitation and censure in the journalistic world. Nevertheless, undaunted by the general reprobation, Ruskin collected the essays together in book form in 1862. But though only a thousand copies were printed, over a hundred still remained on hand, eleven years later. It was only when, later, he undertook the publishing of his works, through George Allen, on his own account, that the book achieved anything like a reasonable circulation, and about two thousand copies were sold a year. Nevertheless, of all Ruskin's works, *Unto this Last* probably had the greatest influence. Workmen too poor to buy the book copied it out word for word; distinguished Europeans learned especially to read it: Tolstoy was most deeply impressed by it, and Gandhi once stated that it changed his life. And in 1906, when a questionnaire as to what books had influenced them most was issued to the Labour M.P.s in the new Parliament, *Unto this Last* appeared in the greatest number of replies.

"He seems to me to have the best talent for *preaching* of all men now alive," Carlyle wrote to Thomas Erskine, upon the publication of the book. "He has entirely blown up the world that used to call itself 'Art', and left it in an impossible posture, uncertain whether on its feet at all or on its head, and conscious that there will be no continuing on the bygone terms. If he could do as much for Political Economy (as I hope), it would be the greatest achievement achieved by preaching for generations past; the chasing off of one of the brutallest nightmares that ever sate on the bosom of slumberous mankind, kept the *soul* of them squeezed down in an invisible state, as if they had no soul, but only a belly and beaver faculty in these last sad ages, and were about *arriving* we know where in consequence. I have read nothing that pleased me better for many a year than these new Ruskiniana."<sup>1</sup>

As for Ruskin himself, in his old age he told a friend that if all his books were to be burnt, save one, *Unto this Last* was the one that he would keep.

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. 2, p. 252.

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## Chapter II

1. *Difficulties at home: Winnington Hall: holiday at Boulogne: visit to the La Touches: Rose's illness.* 2. *Bonneville: the sorrows of an agnostic: restlessness and dissatisfaction.* 3. *Deaths of Mrs. Browning and Mrs. Rossetti.* 4. *Abroad with the Burne-Jones: retirement to Mornex: friction with John James: finding a house: study and manual work: suffering and indignation: solicitude of his friends: plans for a house: the project abandoned.* 5. *Essays in "Fraser's": more disapprobation: Carlyle's support.* 6. *The arguments of "Munera Pulveris": wealth, money and riches: the caste system: slavery: providence and improvidence.* 7. *Stillman's letter to Rossetti.*

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### I

AFTER the adverse reception of his first essays upon Political Economy, Ruskin spent a somewhat gloomy autumn and winter at Denmark Hill. To add to the general depression of the household, Mrs. Ruskin was laid up most of the time with a broken thigh-bone, and John James was in a state of strained bewilderment over the unfavourable criticisms that continued to be voiced by acquaintances and friends. In despair, as he wrote to Norton, Ruskin took to watching penguins for consolation, since they were so ridiculous as to be a perfect cure for anger. "When I begin to think at all, I get into such a state of disquiet and fury at the way the mob is going on (meaning by mob, chiefly Dukes, Crown Princes and such-like persons) that I choke."<sup>1</sup> In a long letter dated 25 February, he wrote his friend again of his present difficulties. "I hope to finish my essay on Political Economy some day soon, then to write no more. I felt so strongly the need of clear physical health in order to do this, and that my present life so destroyed my health, that I was in terrible doubt as to what to do for a long time this summer and winter. It seemed to me that to keep any clearheadedness, free from intellectual trouble, and other pains, no life would do for me but one as like Veronese's as might be, and I was seriously, and despairingly, thinking of going to Paris or Venice and breaking away from all modern society and opinion, and doing I don't know what. Intense scorn of all I had hitherto done or thought, still intenser scorn of other people's doings and thinkings, especially in religion; the perception of colossal power more and more in Titian and of weakness in purism, and almost unendurable solitude in my own home, only made more painful to me by parental love which did not and never could help me, and which was cruelly hurtful without knowing it; and terrible discoveries in the course of such

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 100.

investigations as I made into grounds of old faith—were all concerned in this. . . .

"I don't in the least know what might have been the end of it, if a little child (only thirteen last summer) hadn't put her fingers on the helm at the right time, and chosen to make a pet of herself for me, and her mother to make a friend of herself . . . certainly the ablest and I think the best woman I have ever known. As for things that have influenced me, I believe hard work, love of justice and of beauty, good nature and great vanity, have done all of me that was worth doing. I've had my heart broken, ages ago, when I was a boy—then mended, cracked, beaten in, kicked about old corridors, and finally, I think, fairly flattened out. I've picked up what education I've got in an irregular way—and it's very little . . . but granting liberty and power of travelling as I chose, I suppose everything I've chosen to have been about as wrong as could be. I ought not to have written a word; but should merely have waited on Turner as much as he would have let me, putting in writing every word that fell from him, and drawing hard. By this time, I might have been an accomplished draughtsman, a fair musician, and a thoroughly good scholar in art and literature, and in good health besides. As it is, I've written a few second-rate books which nobody minds; I can't draw, I can't play nor sing, I can't ride, I walk worse and worse, I can't digest. And I can't help it.—There."<sup>1</sup>

In the spring he gave a not very successful lecture on Tree Twigs at the Royal Institution (which Carlyle liked), and as a symbolic gesture presented many drawings from his Turner collection to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Then, feeling empty of all power and devoid of all intentions, he escaped from Denmark Hill to spend a few days at Miss Bell's school for girls at Winnington Hall, in which he had now been interested for some time.

Ruskin had known Miss Bell now for nearly two years. An ardent admirer of his works, she had brought many of her older girls to one of his lectures, and, realising the great advantage to be derived from cultivating his acquaintance, invited him in the most friendly and flattering terms to visit the school and give impromptu talks to her pupils.

Winnington Hall, in Cheshire, was a fine Adam house, spacious and pleasant, with long galleries and vast, imposing rooms. The octagon-shaped drawing-room was forty feet high, with a huge open fireplace, its walls hung with fine engravings by Turner and Raphael. There was a chapel with stained glass windows and an organ; and the house itself stood on an eminence, surrounded by a park of magnificent trees, which on one side sloped down to the river.

Miss Bell, an intelligent, efficient and agreeable woman, was, in

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 104 ff.

her day, a pioneer of education. Privately besieged with the religious doubts which were beginning to afflict many of the more thoughtful members of the Church, she nevertheless contrived to combine in her curriculum the social amenities with a carefully planned and unorthodox form of education. Athletics were practised far more than was usual at that time; the girls were encouraged to specialise in subjects for which they had a particular interest and aptitude; distinguished musicians were invited down to give concerts; and distinguished men to lecture. It was, in fact, the Dartington Hall of the 1860's. "What it's called a school for," Ruskin wrote to his father on 8 August, 1863, "I can't think; except that if Miss Bell called it a playhouse, it might be mistaken for a theatre."<sup>1</sup>

When Ruskin visited Winnington for the first time, he had been enchanted. He liked the house; he liked the spacious, well wooded park with the river running through it; he liked the atmosphere of intelligence and youthful ardour which pervaded the school; and he enjoyed the meals, where the children assembled at one long table with happy faces which reminded him of the great Paul Veronese in the Louvre. It gave him pleasure, renewed the lost youth he was beginning to feel so acutely, to join in folk dancing with the girls, to play hide and seek with them; to write words for them to sing to the tunes they danced to: to give them impromptu talks of an evening in the great drawing-room, on the Bible or on geology.

Miss Bell, perceiving his appreciation, had invited him to stay as long as he liked. She had a room with a fine view of the river on three sides always set aside for him, and Ruskin had stayed there with pleasure for several weeks writing *The Elements of Perspective*. Since then, he had gradually assumed the unofficial position of being one of the school's chief patrons. His portrait had a proud position in the library next to those of F. D. Maurice, the Bishop of Oxford and Archdeacon Hare; and with customary generosity he lent many of his favourite pictures and drawings, mineralogical specimens, and even money when it was required.

But Winnington Hall not only pleased the teacher in Ruskin; not only provided him with an atmosphere of ardour and appreciation in which he could work; it was one of the few places he could go with a good conscience to get away from Denmark Hill, where his father still fidgeted if his son was so reckless as to visit a music hall, and his mother was so distressed at his going to the East End that he even had to abandon a proposed lecture to working men there. It was during this visit to Winnington that Ruskin received an invitation from Lord Palmerston to spend a week-end at Broadlands, which Ruskin did not wish to accept, but which his father, still pathetically anxious for him to climb socially, was anxious that he should not refuse. "It certainly worries me very much to have this invitation

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 8.8.1863; *Works*, vol. 18, p. lxix.

from the Palmerstons' just now—not because I want to stay here, but because I give great pleasure by staying and because I don't want to go *there*. . . . It is terrible hard work, that talking among people at Broadlands; and the children here will have their Easter holidays quite spoiled. However, if you are really set upon it, give me four more of Griffiths' or Mrs. Cooper's sketches (. . . for the four days I lose) and I'll leave on Thursday . . . and go to Broadlands on Friday morning, and come up to town with them on Monday. Two whole days is enough for anybody at these great houses. You needn't think I'm in love with any of the girls here, and get me out of it, therefore—Rosie's my only pet. I don't think it in the least necessary to accept *every* invitation one gets from that kind of people. They'll think twice as much of me if I don't go this time; and ask me again all the sooner. You had much better take me at my word, and let me stay here as I intended till Monday; after Monday I can't stay, positively, as I've got to examine things at the Geological Society; so you'll have me home on Monday evening (D.V.) *either way*, positively.

"If you make up your mind to-morrow morning about this, send me telegram what I'm to do. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This letter, written by a distinguished man of forty-two to his father, is sufficient evidence of the formidable domination that was still exerted upon him continually, and which was driving him, even if unconsciously, to desperation.

When he left Winnington Ruskin went for a holiday to Boulogne, where he wrote long letters to his "dearest Rosie", recovered all the pleasures of his childhood, and indulged many new ones that then would have been denied him. He sat for hours upon the beach staring at the sea; he became friends with the simple fisher-folk; went with them mackerel fishing, and learned to sail a French lugger. The refinement and intelligence of the sailors impressed him deeply, and he found the same pleasure in their company that, far away in Russia, Tolstoy was finding in working with the peasants on his estate.

In August he returned to England, principally in order to accept "a very earnest invitation" from Mrs. La Touche, who had recently entertained the Prince of Wales, and, having given a luncheon for eighty people, and invited the villagers onto the lawn to see the guest of honour, now apparently felt the need of more sympathetic society. "Mr. La Touche, who received me, seemed entirely glad to see me—even by surprise," Ruskin wrote to his father on 29 August. "The children (I'm happy to say, for I feared they had been getting into late hours) had all gone to bed—but not quite into it—and Percy scampered down bare-footed like a little Irishman; Rosie followed presently in tiny pink dressing gown; and Wisie, like Grisi in *Norma*—all very happy and very well. . . .

"The place is frightfully large—the park, I mean: not quite so

<sup>1</sup> Letter (7 March, 1861): *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 359-60.

pretty as I expected. The stream—brown and clear—is pretty, and has fine pebbly bottom, but that is all. . . . This is just no end of trees and park, with peeps of Wicklow Hills in the gaps, but no appearance of pleasant walks or odd, out of the way places. . . .

“Rosie herself wears a little red cap here, and is very wild—and very angry at my insisting on staying in my room and doing letters and geology till lunch time, which takes away all hope of her escaping any of her lessons. After lunch we’re going to build a bridge across the Liffey, as I used to do at Coniston and Low-wood—at least if it keeps fine. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Here, in this house by the Liffey, where sheep cropped pacifically in the meadows, where the grasses and sedges were plumed with silver and gold, and stirred with exquisite grace beneath every gust of wind, their gilded tips reflected in the sluggish water: where there were quiet, lovely walks by the banks of the river, where the water which ran from the peaty hills was a subtle purple, and the dragonflies were brilliant as coloured fireworks, Ruskin, for a short space, found the sympathy he craved. He would take the children for long walks, fascinating them by his spontaneous dissertations upon minerals, clouds or flowers: he would help them to try to build dams or bridges in suitable places; or listen eagerly while the thirteen-year-old Rosie walked like a little white statue through the woods at twilight, talking solemnly.

And here, too, at Harristown, he confessed to Mrs. La Touche the loss of his religious beliefs. Mrs. La Touche, herself a devout member of the Anglican Church in Ireland, expressed her deep concern; and so fearful was she lest he should publish anything upon the subject that might, coming from so persuasive a pen, do harm to the Church, that she extracted a promise from him that he would write nothing of his unbelief for at least ten years.

Shortly after Ruskin left the big, square, Georgian house of the La Touches, Rose fell ill. John James, acquainted of every fact that concerned his son with the most punctilious exactitude, wondered whether this could have had any connection with his son’s departure. “Rosie’s illness has assuredly *nothing* to do with any regard she may have for me,” Ruskin assured him. “She likes me to pet her, but it is no manner of trouble when I go away: her affection takes much more the form of a desire to please me and make me happy in any way she can, than of any want for herself, either of my letters or my company.”<sup>2</sup>

A few days before Christmas, however, Ruskin confided to his father: “I have such a coaxing letter from Rosie that I might perhaps have come home three days sooner for it; only perhaps Mamma and you might have been more jealous than pleased, and Mrs. La Touche

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 29.8.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 1.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 386.

have thought me absurd. Here is a funny little dialogue between her and her mother the other night, which she (Mrs. L.) sends me.

"Mrs. L. 'Rosie, don't you wish Bt. C. would come home?'

"Rosie. 'Yes, indeed I do. How tiresome of him!'

"Mrs. L. 'Do you think he wants us at all?'

"Rosie. 'Well, perhaps he does. I think he wants to see me, Mamma.'

"Mrs. L. 'And doesn't he want to see me?'

"Rosie. 'Well—you know—well—Mamma, I think he likes your letters quite as much as yourself, and you write so very often—and I can't write often. So he must want to see me.'"<sup>1</sup>

By now Rose had become an inseparable part of Ruskin's life, and two days later he wrote to his father again. "I am sorry to have stayed here so long as I have, but I had several things to make up my mind about very seriously, and under circumstances of some ambiguousness—what my conduct should be to the La Touches was the chief of these: and *that* depended partly on my thoroughly knowing the state of my own health, and partly on my finding out if possible whether Rosie was what her mother and you think her, an entirely simple child, or whether she was what *I* think her, that is to say, in an exquisitely beautiful and tender way, and *mixed* with much childishness, more subtle even than Catherine of Boulogne."<sup>2</sup>

2

When he returned to England, Ruskin paid a few visits, spent a dutiful week at Denmark Hill, and then went back to Boulogne. From here he moved to Bonneville for some weeks, and then, seized once more with the restlessness of despair, went on to Lucerne, where he re-read the classics, and devoted much time to the works of Xenophon and Plato, which were henceforward to exert a profound influence upon all his thought. "I fully intend finishing political economy, but otherwise than as I began it,"<sup>3</sup> he wrote to his father on 5 November. "I have first to read Xenophon's *Economist* and Plato's *Republic* carefully and to master the economy of Athens. . . . I do not allow reviewers to disturb me; but I cannot write when I have an audience,"<sup>4</sup> he added ten days later. And to Carlyle he wrote about the same time: "I have little pleasure, and no pain, except toothache sometimes. I forget, resolutely, all that human beings are doing of ridiculous, or suffering of its consequences; try to regret nothing—and to wish for nothing. I am obliged to pass much time in mere quiet—and standing with one's hands behind one's back is tiresome. I make up my mind to be tired and stand. The nights, if

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 21.12.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 23.12.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 5.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 17, p. xlix.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 15.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 17, p. 1.



one wakes in them, are sadly long—one tries to think ‘after all—it is life—why should one wish it shorter?’ and one is thankful, in spite of such philosophy, when the clock strikes.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact, he was still pursued with horror at the political chaos in Europe, and fast entering his private *Dark Night of the Soul*. “I tremble every paper I open, but am prepared for the worst,” he had written Mrs. Browning a year ago: “perhaps my present despondency is because I have thoroughly anticipated all the probable worsts. I think of Venice as utterly destroyed, with Verona, and with all the pictures in them, which, to me, means nearly half the pictures in the world.”<sup>2</sup> The following May, discussing the problems of religion, he had added: “I am stunned—palsied—utterly helpless—under the weight of finding out the myriad errors that I have been taught about these things; every reed that I have leant on shattering itself joint from joint—I stand, not so much melancholy as amazed—I am not hopeless, but I don’t know what to hope for. I have that bitter verse pressing me, ‘I am a worm, and no man’.”<sup>3</sup> To Norton he had written from Holyhead at the end of August: “I think I see how one ought to live, now, but my own life is lost—gone by. I looked for another world, and find there is only this, and that is past for me: what message I have given is all wrong: has to be all re-said, in another way, and is, so said, almost too terrible to be servicable.”<sup>4</sup> In September he had written to his father, “It is a difficult thing to live without hope of another world, when one has been used to it for forty years. But by how much the more difficult, by so much it makes one braver and stronger.”<sup>5</sup> And on 5 October, he had written again to his father, who had said that he would give half of all he had if only Ruskin were feeling like the Nun at Le Puy: “I know no example in history of men once breaking away from their early beliefs, and returning to them again. The Unbeliever may be taught to believe—but not Julian the Apostate to return. However, if you look at the world—take America—Austria—France—and see what their form of Christianity has done for them—possibly the form that is coming may do more, and I may be more useful, as I always have been, as an iconoclast than as a conservative.”<sup>6</sup> And though often he denied that he was physically unwell, to Dr. Brown he confided early in December that this last year he had been seriously ill; though no one knew it but himself.

From Lucerne, at the end of the year, Ruskin went home to his parents, for duty’s sake; and there prepared *Unto this Last* for the press and began the series of papers that were to be entitled later

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 7.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 25.11.1860: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 350.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 13.5.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 364.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 116 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 29.9.1861: *Works*, vol. 17, p. xxxviii.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of 5.10.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 384.

*Munera Pulveris*. But he found the life with a father who still treated him as a youth of seventeen, and a mother who, now that his religious beliefs no longer coincided with hers, "put him down more than ever, and could be reasonable only when one doesn't talk about actors or Mr. Gladstone, or anyone else she has taken an antipathy to" (and her antipathies were many), became increasingly unendurable to him. "I don't speak to anybody about anything," he wrote at this time to C. E. Norton: "if anybody talks to me, I go into the next room. I sometimes find the days very long, and the nights longer; then I try to think it is at the worst better than being dead; and so long as I can keep clear of toothache, I think I shall do pretty well."<sup>1</sup> He went to the National Gallery to remove mildew from some of the Turner drawings which had been left derelict in the basement; and performed perfunctorily his customary occupations. But after a few weeks his one preoccupation was how he could get away. "I must find a home—or at least the shadow of a Roof of my own somewhere; certainly not here,"<sup>2</sup> he wrote to Norton; and to Rawdon Brown: "I have no house of my own—not even rooms; and living with two old people, however good, is not good for a man."<sup>3</sup>

By the middle of May, he could bear it no longer, and set out for Switzerland once more with the Burne-Jones.

## 3

On 30 June, 1861, Mrs. Browning died at Florence. This had been a deep grief to Ruskin. For several years his letters to her had been growing steadily more intimate, and it had been his hope to visit her in Italy and to establish their friendship on a closer basis. From the earliest days of the long period of depression, the Brownings had shown him deep sympathy and encouragement. "I am to say something, dear Ruskin;" Browning had added as a note to one of his wife's letters early in 1859. "It shall be only the best of wishes for this and all other years; go on again, like the noble and dear man you are to us all, and especially to us two out of them all. Whenever I chance on an extract or report, it lights up the dull newspaper stuff wrapt around it and makes me glad at heart, and clearer in head."<sup>4</sup>

On 17 November, 1861, Ruskin wrote to Browning in condolence: "I do not know what other of your friends may have ventured to write or to say to you. I could say nothing—*can* say nothing, but that I love you, and there are few people whom I do—and that when you care to see me, or hear from me, I shall thankfully come if I can, or write if I cannot. I think also I may venture to say this: that however enthusiastic the love, or devoted the respect, borne by all, whose

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 121 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Various Correspondents*, by J. Ruskin, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. F. G. Kenyon, vol. 2, pp. 299-301.

respect and love was in any way worthy of her, to Mrs. Browning, there was not one among them who more entirely and reverently shared in aim and hope with her than I; no one who regards her loss with a more grave, enduring bitterness and completeness of regret—not the acute, consolable suffering of a little time, but the established sense of unredeemable, unparalleled loss, which will not pass away.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, as he left home, Ruskin carried in imagination a vivid picture of the tragic and beautiful Lizzie Rossetti, who had died from an overdose of laudanum the previous February.

Rossetti had married Miss Siddal at last on 23 May, 1860. To his mother he had written the previous April: “Like all the important things I ever meant to do,—to fulfil duty or secure happiness,—this one has been deferred almost beyond possibility.”<sup>2</sup> And, indeed, wearied with disappointment and waiting, worn down by the implacable ravages of her insidious disease, better than her sister-in-law Christina she might have written on her wedding morn:

“Too late for love, too late for joy,  
 Too late, too late!  
 You loitered on the road too long,  
 You trifled at the gate:  
 The enchanted dove upon her branch  
 Died without a mate;  
 The enchanted princess in her tower  
 Slept, died, behind the grate;  
 Her heart was starving all this while;  
 You made it wait.”

It was several years now since Princess Ida (as Ruskin used to call her) had declined to accept her allowance from him. Too ill to work with any consistency, she was oppressed with the thought of having committed herself to a bargain that she could not keep; and though Ruskin, with his rare generosity of nature, would willingly have continued to pay the money without any return (it is doubtful whether he had ever expected very much), just as he would have “offered her a cup of tea had she been thirsty, or a chair had she been tired”,<sup>3</sup> she was too proud, and too honest, to follow a course that would have afforded the Bohemian Rossetti not the slightest qualms.

The newly married Georgiana Burne-Jones, visiting her one day with the newly married and lovely Jane Morris, received then “an impression which never wore away, of romance and tragedy between her and her husband”.<sup>4</sup> Long afterwards she recalled the little upstairs bedroom where Lizzie took her when she arrived, with its lattice window: the mass of her beautiful deep red hair as she took off her bonnet, which, but loosely fastened, fell in deep and heavy

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 17.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to W. Allingham*, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 5, p. xlv.

<sup>4</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 208.

fold; her complexion which looked as if a rose tint lay beneath the white skin, producing a most soft and delicate pink for the darkest flesh tone; her golden-brown, wonderfully luminous agate-coloured eyes.

Ruskin had hastened to visit them at Chatham Place as soon as he returned from Switzerland, and coming upon them by chance, had looked through a pile of Rossetti's "Guggums". "I think Ida should be very happy," he wrote next day, "to see how much more beautifully, perfectly and tenderly you draw when you are drawing *her* than when you draw anybody else. She cures you of your worse faults when you only look at her."<sup>1</sup>

When he called next time to see Lizzie, she had been unwell, and would not admit him to her room. She was, in fact, already several months gone with the child that was shortly to be stillborn; and modesty, rather than indifference, probably prevented her from admitting him. But Ruskin, who had a deep affection and sympathy for her, and who realised all her gallant endurance and the dreadful frustration of the invisible bars that closed her in, was deeply hurt. "I wish Lizzie and you liked me enough to—say—put on a dressing-gown and run in for a minute rather than not see me; or paint on a picture in an unsightly state, rather than not amuse me when I was ill," he wrote to Rossetti next day. "But you can't *make* yourselves like me, and you would only like me less if you tried. As long as I live in the way I do here, you can't, of course, know me rightly. . . . I fancy I gall *you* by my want of sympathy in many things, and so lose hold of you,"<sup>2</sup> he added sadly in postscript.

In his fine awareness of the reactions of others, Ruskin's surmise was perfectly correct. With an over-abundance of the feminine vanity of the artist, Rossetti was growing steadily more and more susceptible to all adverse criticism, and rapidly approaching the state of mind which was eventually to become pathological.

Rossetti's present impatience was doubtless due to Ruskin's treatment of his poems. He had sent Ruskin a whole collection, asking him particularly to use his influence with Thackeray to get *Jenny* printed in the *Cornhill*. Ruskin, who had already had his last essay on political economy refused by that organ, considered that *Jenny* was quite unsuitable for submission, and told Rossetti that he thought only a very few people would understand it, and that even so, many of those who did would be offended by the mode of treatment. He also considered that some of the verses were unmelodious and incomplete. He remarked that "fail" did not rhyme with "Belle", nor "funny" with "guinea", and offered willingly to submit the *Nocturne* or a revised version of the *Portrait* instead. Although this is often cited as a proof of Ruskin's stupidity, it is, in fact, rather an example of his

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 252-4.

acumen. He knew (and, in view of Thackeray's later rejection of *Lord Walter's Wife*, quite rightly) that Thackeray would not have accepted such a piece, and wished to spare his ever susceptible friend the humiliation of a rejection. But Rossetti was resentful. "I am sending you the things at last," he wrote to Allingham a few days later: "i.e. the MSS. which Ruskin has only just returned me, I having asked him to send one—viz. *Jenny*, to the *Cornhill* for me—he of course refusing to send that, offering to send some of the mystical ones that I don't care to print by themselves. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it was Ruskin who guaranteed the £100 which Smith and Elder required as part share in publication expenses, before they would accept Rossetti's *Italian Translations*. But in spite of this, Rossetti's resentment was undoubtedly soon increased by Ruskin's unsympathetic and somewhat superficial criticism of Christina's poems, which he had also sent him in manuscript. Although he found the verses of one of the greatest lyric poets of our language full of beauty and power, Ruskin was confident that no publisher would accept them on account of their quaintnesses and offences, and did not hesitate to say so. "Your sister should exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like," he advised. "Then if she puts in her observation and passion,—all will become precious; but she must have form first."<sup>2</sup> Rossetti found this "most senseless", as he told the devoted William, and was scarcely appeased, when upon their publication in 1862, Ruskin found Christina's verses "very, very beautiful",<sup>3</sup> after all.

On the evening of 10 February, 1862, Lizzie had dined with Swinburne and her husband at a favourite restaurant. Rossetti brought her back to Chatham Place in a cab and afterwards went out. The official story is that he went to the Working Men's College to take his class in drawing. But tradition has it that he went to seek solace in the arms of his amiable and vulgar mistress, Sara Cox (or Cornforth, as she preferred to call herself before her marriage); and that Lizzie, who knew it, and who had had to endure the liaison for many years, besides his philanderings with the beautiful Annie Miller, whom Holman Hunt was having educated as his intended wife, and his recent secret infatuation for the sweet-natured and exotically beautiful Jane Morris, felt that she could suffer no more; and so put herself to sleep forever.

Finding her unconscious on his return, Rossetti at once rushed out to find a doctor. But she was beyond all help. It was Madox Brown, summoned immediately, good friend as he was, who then took charge of the situation: Madox Brown who alone saw, and removed discreetly, the pathetic note pinned to her breast, in which

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to W. Allingham*, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp. 258-9.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 160.

Lizzie confessed that her life had become so miserable that she wished for no more of it.

But William Rossetti sent for Ruskin, and when, upon his arrival, Brown, now glad to pay off old scores, told him with quiet triumph that Rossetti was far too prostrate with grief to see visitors, it was William who quietly conducted Ruskin to Lizzie's death bed, and stood behind him while, with reverently bared head, he looked for the last time upon the woman whose frustrated genius he had longed to encourage. Perhaps he, who too had fought disease, who too had lived to realise his own mediocrity both as poet and as artist, understood her better than them all. But no one ever knew what he thought of her relations with Rossetti, for he was never heard to speak of her again. "To one at least who knew her better than most of her husband's friends, the memory of all her marvellous charms of mind and person—her matchless grace, loveliness, courage, endurance, wit, humour, heroism and sweetness—is too dear and sacred to be profaned by any attempt at expression,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Swinburne of her years later. And Allingham, who had first found her, Allingham who considered her pale face, abundant red hair and long thin limbs strange and affecting rather than beautiful, recorded that her short, sad and strange life must have seemed to her like a troubled dream.

4

Burne-Jones (as Edward Jones was in future to call himself) had married his charming and sweet-natured Georgiana MacDonald, "a little country violet with blue eyes and long eyelashes, and as good and sweet as can be",<sup>2</sup> as Ruskin had told Norton in a letter but recently; and, with characteristic generosity, Ruskin wanted to give Mrs. Burne-Jones a holiday after the birth of her first baby, and Burne-Jones, valiantly struggling against poverty, an opportunity to see various parts of Italy and Switzerland which he felt would give pleasure to the man and inspiration to the artist. Although almost a novice, Burne-Jones had already made remarkable progress as a painter. "A name perhaps new to you on our list—but destined to be unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled, in fame by any name of this generation—is Edward Burne-Jones," Rossetti had written to C. E. Norton the previous January. "He is a painter still younger than most of us by a good deal, and who has not yet exhibited, except at some private places; but I cannot convey to you in words the exquisite beauty of all he does. To me no art I know is so utterly delightful, except that of the best Venetians."<sup>3</sup>

They stopped for a few days in Paris, where Ruskin dutifully

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 174-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 305.

visited the five daughters of M. Domecq, found Adèle a comfortable matron who now entertained her sporting husband by translating for his benefit the more obvious jokes in *Punch*, and perhaps inwardly congratulated himself that it was not he who was called upon to enjoy such favours. Then they went on to Lucerne, and slowly crossed the St. Gothard on the way to Milan. It was evidently an agreeable journey. Although, as Ruskin wryly complained, Georgiana "saw everything through a mist of baby"<sup>1</sup> (she was naturally continually thinking of her child with his aunt at home), and Ruskin himself was prone to moods of melancholy, there were memorable evenings at comfortable inns when Ruskin would read poetry to his "dear children", as he called them, or discourse upon art with the persuasive enchantment that was to affect so many. Ruskin had already a great affection for Jones, "whose life", as he wrote to his father, "is as pure as an archangel's, whose genius is as strange and high as that of Albert Dürer or Hans Memling, who loves me with a love as of a brother and—far more—of a devoted friend, whose knowledge of history and of poetry is as rich and varied, nay, far more rich and varied, and incomparably more scholarly than Walter Scott's was at his age".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, so great was the young Jones' devotion to Ruskin that, until his marriage, Ruskin's parents were quite jealous of him. "As for Ruskin, what a dear he is," Burne-Jones wrote enthusiastically to a friend during this tour: "—of his sweetness, his talk, his look, how debonair to everyone, of the nimbus round his head and the wings to match, consult some future occasion of talk."<sup>3</sup> Despite occasional misunderstandings and disappointments on each side, the sympathy and affection which bound them together was to last until death separated them. Not only a similarity of temperament, but even a similarity of appearance, united them: and there is a story that when Ruskin had first visited Morris and Jones at Red Lion Square, "Red Lion Mary", without even asking his name, so convinced was she by his appearance of the relationship, had shown him up at once and announced him to the young painter as "Your father, sir".<sup>4</sup>

Even on the journey, as he was to write a few weeks later to Lady Nasmyth, whom they chanced to meet at Lucerne, the waiters were often much puzzled to find out whether "he was my son, or Georgie my daughter". As usual, Ruskin entertained his guests in the most princely manner, and, in order to spare them all embarrassment, suggested that, if he wished, Burne-Jones should do him some sketches in return. After a few days together at Milan, where Ruskin stayed principally in order to copy and study Luini, and make a report upon the frescoes for the Arundel Society, and whence Burne-Jones wrote to his sister-in-law, when he was copying Luini's frescoes

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.7.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 12.8.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. liii.

<sup>3</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 147.

in San Maurizio: "I am drawing from a fresco that has never been seen since the day it was painted, in jet darkness, in a chapel where candlesticks, paper flowers, and wooden dolls abound freely. Ruskin, by treacherous smiles and winning courtesies and delicate tips, has wheedled the very candlesticks off the altar for my use, and the samite table and his everything that was his, and I draw every day now by the light of eight altar candles; also fat man stands at the door and says the church is shut if anybody comes, and when the priest himself put his head in, the fat man said, 'Hush-sh-sh-sh!' and frightened the poor priest away,"<sup>1</sup>—Ruskin's generosity to sacristans, and the affection in which they held his memory, had already become famous. William Rossetti, who was in Venice at this time, found a sacristan at the church of Murano who not only remembered "Signor Roveschin with his *bella moglie*"<sup>2</sup> but deplored how horrified they would be to see the church in its present condition, and asked to be remembered to Ruskin "for whom he had conceived a great regard". While two years later, when at Verona, he noted in his diary: "The custode, a most intelligent young man, who takes the most genuine interest in his church, remembers Ruskin well, and seems to have been imbued with some of his love for the old, hatred, frustration, etc."<sup>3</sup>

The Jones went off, with Ruskin still as their absent host, to Verona, Padua and Venice: and presently Ruskin was writing to his "dearest children" in characteristic style not to make "such mighty grand sketches. I want a very slight one of the St. Sebastian in St. Rocco (Scuola), and a rough sketch in colour of the High Priest in the Circumcision, in Scuola, by the stair foot. And I want you a week *here*. I will have ever so many cwt. of candles lighted in the Monastero, and you must sketch the two Christs for me, please".<sup>4</sup>

Jones, more sweet-natured and less robust in character than Rossetti, took no exception to these affectionate commands though, with the delicacy of Lizzie Siddal, so much generosity embarrassed him, and presently he wrote from Venice: "Georgie begins to grow pining for her kid and I long to be at work, for I don't work here, and I have cheated and defrauded you into bringing me out to do nothing, and if I thought of it much I should be miserable—only I set my teeth and swear inwardly that you shall have drawing after drawing when I get home from time to time, original drawings, not copies—ha! don't scold me and call me unfriendly and mean for bothering about the tin, I should be a pig if I had no feeling about business, you must confess."<sup>5</sup> And a few months later, when "Papa, J. R." continued to linger in Switzerland, he wrote tenderly, "Wouldn't cheery company do you a little good? How I wish you were here in

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 247.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 246.



London. I feel so certain you would be better for a little sympathetic circle of men to see you sometimes. Gabriel sends much love to you; I know how glad he would be if you were amongst us; a little three or four of us this winter might be so quiet and happy if you would but come."<sup>1</sup>

But Ruskin was determined not to return to England. Finding himself "utterly prostrated by the effort made at Milan"<sup>2</sup> (as he wrote later to Norton), he retired to the little village of Mornex in High Savoy. "The truth is," he wrote to Lady Nasmyth from here, "that the state of indignation in which I have lived for these three or four last years, mixed with considerable personal suffering, have made me for the present dislike the face of man. I can't speak for horror at the way things are done and undone;—these American and Austrian wars, and our English brutal avarice and stupidity, force me now to dead silence and keeping out of people's way. No friends are of any use to me—a year's ploughing or digging or fishing would be if I had strength for it, which I have not: nevertheless, by help of mute work of some temperate sort, I hope still to keep alive. . . . Mrs. Browning was killed by the peace of Villafranca. I have never been the same since—nor shall be—and what are we compared to the myriads of noble souls whose blood is poured out as water, while smooth English propriety maintains the Austrians at Venice, the Pope at Rome—and the Devil everywhere. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

And two days later (20 July) he was writing to Lady Trevelyan, to whom his parents had evidently been complaining of his absence: ". . . You ask me if I have been ill—I wish I knew. There are symptoms about me which may be nothing or may be everything—but I am better than I was, and when I can be quiet, it seems to me that some strength is coming back, but the least bustle or worry puts me all wrong again. I know my father is ill, but I cannot stay at home just now, or should fall indubitably ill myself, also, which would make him worse. He has more pleasure if I am able to write him a cheerful letter than generally when I'm there—for we disagree about all the universe, and it vexes him, and much more than it vexes me. If he loved me less, and believed in me more, we should get on; but his whole life is bound up in me, and yet he thinks me a fool—that is to say, he is mightily pleased if I write anything that has big words and no sense in it, and would give half his fortune to make me a member of parliament if he thought I would talk, provided the talk hurt nobody, and was all in the papers.

"This form of affection galls me like hot iron, and I am in a state of subdued fury whenever I am at home, which drives all the marrow out of every bone in me. Then he hates all my friends (except you),

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Letter of 18.7.1862: Works*, vol. 36, pp. 412–13.

and I have had to keep them all out of the house—and have lost all the best of Rossetti—and of his poor dead wife, who was a creature of ten thousand—and other such; I must have a house of my own now, somewhere. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

These difficulties with his parents were to oppress him heavily all through the following months. “I know my resolution to stay here must give you much pain,” he wrote to his father from Geneva, where he had been staying for a few days, on 10 August, “and I shall receive some painful letters in consequence. I am sorry, but it is unavoidable. I answer in advance some things I know you will say.

“That I have failed just at the most provoking moment?—It is true. The horse fails just at the leap, not as it crosses the ploughed field. If it is a good horse, the rider should know it has rightly measured its powers, and that he had better be shaken in his seat a little, than go down together.

“That I have broken my promises?—My promise was of course made, and to be understood, in terms of health and life.

“My mother and you have such pain at present in thinking my character is deteriorating?—Now, once for all—though this assertion may somewhat pain you on the one side, it should more pleasure you on the other. I could easily prove to you if I chose, but take it on my word, and do not force me to humiliate you by doing so—that I am an incomparably nobler and worthier person now, when you disapprove of nearly all I say and do, than I was when I was everything you and my mother desired me.”<sup>2</sup>

Two days later, Ruskin went to look at a house on the slope of the Salève, about five miles between Geneva and Bonneville, which he intended to rent until such time as he could find what he wanted as a permanent home. “It is in exquisite situation and air,” he told his father, “but has not good view from the windows, though perfectly divine view from the garden. But I could get good meat every day from Geneva, and my letters, as now. . . . There is no chance of my changing my idea about a house,” he continued. “I have intended it for twenty years; and should have done it long ago, but I could not bear to leave you and my mother so much alone, nor should I now, but that, beyond all doubt or mistake—my health compels me to leave London. There was a question in my mind, until lately, between the Swiss house and taking part of a house with Rossetti, to follow out our work together in London; but the experiment I have made at painting at Milan has shown me that I must for the present rest in mountain air. . . .”

This house, after a second inspection, he decided to take. It was a white, two-storeyed building with dormer windows in its sloping roof, and a neat and symmetrical array of shuttered windows on the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.7.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 413-14.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 10.8.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 418-19.

two floors below. But the view from the windows, as he had told his father, was without interest, and presently he found the rooms too small. Having with him now Crawley, his man, and Couttet, the guide, and George Allen and his wife and children, whom he had sent for to England to join him, presently he took a second cottage lower down the hill—a modest but pleasant little retreat which had once sheltered the Empress of Russia. Very soon he wrote to communicate his pleasure to his father. “I have slept in my new house two nights, and passed the days in the garden, and am much pleased. The bedroom window opens on a wooden gallery about six or seven feet above the garden, beneath, there is a bed of white convolvulus rising in three spires, as high as the cottage, on hop poles; then the garden slopes south-east, steeply; having an ever-running spring about four yards from the door, falling out of upright wooden pipes into stone basin, forming a lovely clear pool. Beds of crimson and blue convolvulus, marigold, nasturtium, and chrysanthemum, with intermediate cabbages and artichoke, occupy the most of the little space, all afire; surrounded by a rough, mossy low stone wall, about a foot and a half high at the bottom of garden. . . .”<sup>1</sup> “I sleep at the Empress’s (Crawley and Allen above me, Couttet here)—” he told his father, “dress chiefly outside in my balcony, the air being as soft as in Italy; then walk over here, after a turn round the garden; find breakfast laid by Franceline, and my little table beside it with Horace and Xenophon. Read till eleven; walk or garden till half-past one. Dine here, where I have a nice little dining-room; back into garden, tea among my convolvulus there—with sunset on the Alps opposite; bed at nine or half-past.”<sup>2</sup>

Evidently John James had proved more sympathetic to his son’s plans than Ruskin had expected; for on 17 August he wrote to John James again: “If you write such nice letters in answer, it is enough to make me go on writing half cruel letters: but I hope they are over now; I can hardly account for the instinct which forced them from me just at that time, unless it was, by showing you how sulky I was, to make you less regret my visiting nowhere. But there was a very bitter feeling of distress, both for you and for myself, in my mind as I came over the Simplon, thinking how much otherwise it might have been for both of us if we had understood and managed each other better, of which it is needless to speak more. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

By good fortune, it happened that Ruskin’s “landlady” was a widow of the late professor of history in the University of Geneva who still possessed a fine library and access to the books and manuscripts of the University library, so her tenant was able to borrow any quantity of books, which he read sitting out on the verandah. “I’m going

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 12.8.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 17.9.1862: *Works*, vol. 17, p. lvii.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 17.8.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 420.

dreamily back to my geology, and upside down botany, and so on," he told Lady Trevelyan. "I'm very sorry for them at home, as they will feel it at first—but no course was possible but this, whatever may come of it. I trust they will in the issue be happier; they will if things go right with me, and they won't see much less of me, only I shall be clearly there on visit, and master of my own house and ways here—which, at only six years short of fifty, it is time to be. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Soon the pure, clear air, the beautiful surroundings and the pleasant, monotonous, busy routine of his daily life, began to have a beneficial effect. He dug for hours in his kitchen garden, soothed by the pleasant rhythm of the exercise; he made many alterations and improvements, mixing mortar, trundling a wooden barrow; he fixed a bill and paved a little courtyard with stones carried on the back of a small donkey. After barely three weeks he was writing to Mrs. Hewitt, "You ask how I am in health—I have not the least notion, except that I walk somewhat, eat somewhat, sleep somewhat. You ask, 'Is the Burden of Life lighter?'—Much, for I have less of it now, and less in prospect than ever before. What else is there? Of Associates? Plenty; there are plenty of vipers hereabouts if one looks for them—some large lizards and innumerable small ones—and, what is a mercy, plenty of accessible places where are neither men nor women."<sup>2</sup>

His spirits gradually lightened now that the continual pressure upon him of possessive and dominating personalities was partially removed, and sometimes, spending his days with the interested busyness of a wise and diligent child, he experienced anew all the ecstasy of childhood. "I have had so good a day to-day, that it almost frightens me, lest I should be 'fey', or lest something should be going to happen," he wrote to his father towards the end of October. "I have been literally in high spirits—the first this six or seven years. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Only then did he feel that he could face a few weeks in England again: and, early in November, returned to pay a dutiful visit to his parents. But by Christmas he was back again with his wheelbarrow, his lizards and his mountains: and there he remained for the greater part of the following year.

But even at Mornex, living the contemplative life as close as he could get to nature, Ruskin could not detach himself for long from the recurrent tragedies of the external world. Without the creative ability of a Tolstoy, his imagination nevertheless exceeded Tolstoy's, in that he was tortured by evils that were personally remote from himself, whereas Tolstoy was only afflicted by them when he was confronted by them personally. "The peace in which I live at present," he wrote to Norton on 10 March, "is only as if I had buried

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 13.9.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 424.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 27.10.1862: *Works*, vol. 17, p. lx.

myself in a tuft of grass in a battlefield wet with blood, for the cry of the earth about me is in my ears continually if I did not lay my head to the very ground. The folly and horror of humanity enlarge to my eyes daily."<sup>1</sup> And to his father he wrote some five weeks later ". . . this regret is all nothing—compared with the sense of indignation which burns me continually for all that men are doing and suffering, and *this* I can only escape by keeping out of sight. . . . There are not two men in the Parliament of England who would not be more angry if the Emperor of Russia stopped their partridge shooting than if he murdered every soul in his dominions. . . ."<sup>2</sup> To this mood was added the bitter burden of his now lost youth. As he had written to Norton shortly before, "Am I not in a curiously *unnatural* state of mind in this way—that at forty-three, instead of being able to settle to my middle-aged life like a middle-aged creature, I have more instincts of youth about me than when I was young, and am miserable because I cannot climb, run or wrestle, sing or flirt—as I was when a youngster because I couldn't sit writing metaphysics all day long. Wrong at both ends of life. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

By this time many of Ruskin's old friends were becoming alarmed for him. "I have had one or two very sad letters from Ruskin of late—so sad as to make me anxious about him," Norton wrote to D. G. Rossetti. "If you have seen him lately, I wish you would tell me how he seemed to you, and what prospect there is of his regaining health. He is almost as wrong about our war as poor Carlyle; but it is not this that troubles me about him, but his general condition of despondency and gloom."<sup>4</sup> No less concerned was the affectionate Burne-Jones. "Oh, don't despair about health, or even think it is too late," he wrote from England. "You must and shall grow strong, and do lots of work, and when you are very old you shall sleep somewhere where we can kiss every stone or blade of grass that covers you. I sometimes think of that sad time when my light will go out when you are withdrawn, but when that time comes I must spend my love about the place, and paint the place and make it pretty, and that shall be years to come when I am old myself, and worthy of doing it. So never any more mention that mountain top, please dear."<sup>5</sup> Burne-Jones, indeed, was as anxious that Ruskin should return to England as were Ruskin's parents. "May we begin to advertise now for a suitable house, to be ready by next Lady Day? and if so, will you let us know how many rooms you would want and any other requirements you might have—then we will do everything else. . . ."<sup>6</sup> But Ruskin was still determined to live in Switzerland, particularly as a friendly

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.3.1863: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 436-7.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 16.5.1863: *Works*, vol. 17, pp. xli-xlii.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 16.1.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memoirs of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 268

neighbour with whom he sometimes talked, a splendidly healthy old Genevese doctor, told him that for the sake of his health he ought to live for three months in the year at least in the gentian zone.

And though he returned to England in May, where he lectured, gave evidence before a Royal Commission on the Royal Academy, visited Lady Waterford at Ford Castle, Lady Trevelyan at Wallington, and took the Burne-Jones with him to Winnington, Ruskin was back in Switzerland by the autumn, still full of plans for his new house. From Rossetti and Burne-Jones he had heard much of "Topsy's" *Red House*; and he too intended to elicit the aid of his Pre-Raphaelite friends. Rossetti and Burne-Jones should do all the decoration for him; and the girls at Winnington should weave for him embroidered wall hangings in the style of Jane Morris.

He even got so far as choosing a site with magnificent views on the top of a hill above Bonneville, buying a piece of land from the village commune, and elaborating grandiose plans for constructing a dam to collect the snow for his water supply. "Couttet has been enquiring while I was in England into the titles of the property, and finds them all right," he wrote to his father on 14 September. "There is a Government duty on purchase of land which is either 6 or 6½ per cent, which will add £50 nearly to the price. But, on the other hand, being proprietor in the Valley gives me right to a share of all the common pasture and wood, which is much more than £50 worth . . ."<sup>1</sup> But the shrewd John James persuaded him to take his old tutor, Osborne Gordon, to have a look at the location he had chosen; and Osborne Gordon was steadily eloquent concerning the impracticabilities of the scheme. Delivery of all commodities would be difficult and costly; frequent visits from friends almost impossible. Difficulties arose as to the price of the land, and altogether the project, in the cold light of Osborne Gordon's reason, seemed too chimerical to go on with. Ruskin abandoned his plans, travelled about for a few weeks, and then came home.

## 5

Apart from his studies and his diggings in the garden at Mornex, Ruskin had been far from idle. Nervous exhaustion, physical ill health and general depression could never interfere for long with his indomitable desire for self-expression. At first he had conceived the plan of making tracings of Turner's drawings with the idea of having them engraved and printed: and Allen had been instructed to bring out the necessary materials to make engravings from his own tracings, and also a press to print the plates. But after a few impressions had been made, Ruskin became dissatisfied, and thenceforward devoted all his energies to continuing his essays upon Political Economy.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 14.9.1863: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 453.

Despite the panic which his previous essays had aroused in the owners of the *Cornhill*, Froude, who was now editing *Fraser's*, and had been introduced to Ruskin by Carlyle, had written to Ruskin during the autumn of 1861 inviting him, if he cared, to continue the publication of his essays in his magazine. Overjoyed at this opportunity of being able to complete his chosen work, Ruskin had written his first paper of a new series, which was published in the number for June, during his stay at Milan; and had continued eagerly with the next as soon as he had arrived at Mornex. The second, third and fourth papers, written with intense care, and what Ruskin was later to call "an affected concentration of language",<sup>1</sup> and pondered over with much deliberation during many a long and solitary walk towards the mountains of Bonneville or Annecy, followed in September and December 1862, and in April 1863.

This last essay, Ruskin declared, completed the definitions required for future reference; so that the next would contain the first chapters of the actual body of his work. But at this point the author experienced another serious rebuff. His essays had been greeted by a second outburst of detraction; and although Froude was willing to continue them, the publishers of the magazine refused to permit any others to be printed; and the readers were thenceforward protected, as Ruskin wrote later, from any further disturbance on his part. This news, besides being a bitter disappointment, was a great shock to Ruskin. To increase his chagrin, his father had now definitely turned against him, and extracted from him a promise to publish no more controversial letters in the papers unless he had first given his consent. Bewildered and grieved, John James now, to add to Ruskin's acute distress, had printed a private edition of his son's *Juvenilia*, and these, together with a collection of passages from the prose works chosen by W. H. Harrison, he proceeded to distribute to his friends. "I am seriously annoyed by my father's sending you those effete and vile verses of mine," Ruskin had written to Dr. John Brown in December 1861, "in which the good which they do by humiliation is neutralised by the unhealthiness of the discouragement and disgust which seize me whenever I see or hear of them."<sup>2</sup> And now—"Don't send the book of extracts to *anybody* that you can help," he told his father. "Above all—don't send it here. My crest is all very well as long as it means Pork, but I don't love being made into sausages."<sup>3</sup> Already he had begged John James, in a letter written the previous August, to "mind critiques as little as possible; read of me what you can enjoy, put by the rest, and leave my 'reputation' in my own hands, and in God's—in whose management of the matter you and Mamma should trust more happily and peacefully than I can—for you believe that He

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 22, p. 515.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Dr. John Brown*, ed. Liesson and Forest (1907), p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 9.11.1861: *Works*, vol. 17, p. li.

brings all right for everything and everybody; and I, that He appoints noble laws, and blesses those who obey them, and destroys those who do not."

So great was John James' perturbation, indeed, that even Carlyle was at pains to reassure him. "He said," Froude told Ruskin in a letter, "that he had told him that when Solomon's Temple was building it was credibly reported that at least ten thousand sparrows sitting on the trees round declared that it was entirely wrong, quite contrary to received opinion, hopelessly condemned by public opinion. Nevertheless it got finished and the sparrows flew away, and began to chirp the same note about something else."<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle, to whom the volume was eventually dedicated, had been Ruskin's stout supporter. "I have read, a month ago, your first in *Fraser*," he had written on 3 June, 1862, "and ever since had a wish to say to it and you, *Euge, macte nova virtute*. I approved in every particular; calm, definite, clear: rising into the sphere of Plato (our almost best), which in exchange for the sphere of MacCulloch, Mill and co. is a mighty improvement!"<sup>2</sup>

Despite their unpopularity, Ruskin still hoped to collect these *Fraser* papers into a volume. "I want you to do me a set of simple line illustrations of mythology and figurative creatures," he wrote Burne-Jones after his return from Switzerland, "to be engraved and to make a lovely book of my four Political Economy papers in *Fraser*, with a bit I'm just adding. I want to print it beautifully and make it a book everybody *must* have."<sup>3</sup> But evidently the project remained unrealised, and *Munera Pulveris* (as the collected papers were finally called) was not published in volume form until 1872.

## 6

True political economy regulates those acts and habits of a society or state which concern its means of maintenance. But before the principles of a true political economy can be understood, it is necessary first to understand clearly the distinction between the terms wealth, money and riches. Wealth consists of things essentially valuable, in the sense that they contribute in some way—whether through the medium of body, emotion or intelligence—towards the condition of true life: money is merely a convenient symbol representing a claim to such commodities: while riches merely connote the relative position of men with regard to material possessions.

Material wealth may be divided for convenience under the heads of (1) Land with its associated air, water and organisms; (2) Houses, furniture and instruments; (3) Food, medicine and clothing; (4) Books; (5) Works of Art.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 24.10.1862: Collingwood, *Life of John Ruskin*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 30.6.1862: *ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 271.



The value of land depends upon its yield of minerals, its capacity for producing food, its amenable climate, its beauty. The value of buildings consists in their practical suitability, in their historic associations and in their architectural beauty. The value of instruments consists in their capacity to shorten labour and to do what could not be done without their aid; though before they can contribute rightly to the true welfare of a state, it is necessary first to understand which work is best accomplished by hand, and which by the machine. The secondary value of instruments resides in their aid to the abstract sciences. Food, medicine and clothing have value in a state only to the extent that they can be produced in security and distributed intelligently; while books and pictures have value only to the extent that they usefully preserve and communicate facts, or influence towards greater understanding and nobler action.

Money maintains its capacity to procure value only so long as the proportion of the quantity of existing money to the quantity of existing wealth or available labour remains unchanged. Riches, on the other hand, may be acquired in proportion to the will, capacity, shrewdness and covetousness of the individual man. It is riches, therefore, that determine the power of the employer class over the labouring class; and one of the first purposes of a true economy should be to see that this relationship is a just one.

The wealth of a nation consists in its capacity to produce, and in its useful stores, rightly kept and equably distributed. The production and storage of useless or destructive commodities can contribute only to its "illth". The usual belief that labour is limited by capital is entirely fallacious. The true limit of labour is determined only by the combined forces of physical energy and deliberately directed will. Thus true economy depends less upon supply and demand, than upon what commodities are demanded and what are supplied.

This has great bearing upon the terms "cost" and "price". For whereas the cost of anything, as its value, can always, even if only with difficulty, be determined by a just estimation of expended time and energies, price is merely dependent upon the human will, and the relative desire to conserve on the one hand and to acquire on the other.

Profit, which is intimately connected both with cost and with price, is legitimate only when it is just. The sacrosanct axiom of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, since it depends upon taking advantage both of the buyer's urgent need and the seller's urgent poverty, is merely the basest form of unlicensed but legitimised usury. If the state is considered as a living entity, then the government may be likened to the head, the labouring classes to the limbs, and the merchant classes to the heart. And where unlicensed competition exists, there the heart has atrophied and



XXIII JOHN RUSKIN  
About 1869



XXIV. GEORGE MACDONALD, 1862

*From a photograph by Lewis Carroll*

ceased to beat, just as where liberty is completely unopposed, there also must the most abysmal slavery exist.

There can be only one true liberty for each man—deliverance from the bondage of his own passions. And it is only when a man is so delivered that he attains the capacity to govern others and can rightly participate in any system of national economy.

For Ruskin, as for Plato, a right political economy can be established only under a caste system, in which those fitted by nature to rule, rule; and each man performs his true role with awareness both of his own usefulness and his own limitations. It is for this reason that Ruskin's ideas have been so difficult to assess, since they fit into none of the commonplace political divisions. A caste system, to most people, means a moribund or atrophied condition of society in which each man is fixed for life in the environment in which he is born—a system to be maintained or destroyed by force in accordance with personal prejudice, or privilege. This, of course, is merely a pseudo-caste system. A true caste system depends upon the understanding and the acknowledgement that each man is born with different powers and capacities, and that his own health and well-being, together with the health and well-being of the community, can be attained only when, through a right system of education, most men realise their caste and express themselves within it. To serve the state as governor, as soldier, as merchant or as labourer, all these are good and honourable when the service is consistent with the essential being and capacity of the individual. And all are equally disastrous and dishonourable when the individual has failed to realise his place, and asks a part other than that for which he was naturally intended.

Thus a good government can never be attained by universal suffrage—by votes purchasable with beer. Age, experience, trustworthiness, capacity and understanding: all these should receive an additional voting power. For as long as any fool has as much say in the choice of his government as has a wise man, folly is bound to triumph over wisdom. Good government, moreover, is possible only in a community that has not lost the innate and necessary gift of recognising the caste born to rule, and resisting any so-called government that is composed of members of a lower caste.

It is because of his innate belief in a caste system—in the rule of a true aristocracy—that Ruskin's ideas upon slavery, both at the time he wrote, and much later, have been usually insufficiently understood.

"I have not been able to ascertain in definite terms, from the declaimers against slavery, what they understand by it," he wrote in his paper on *Government*. "If they mean only the imprisonment or compulsion of one person by another, such imprisonment or compulsion being in many cases highly expedient, slavery, so defined, would be no evil, but only its abuse; that is to say, when men are slaves,

who should not be, or even the fittest characters for either state placed in it under conditions which should not be. It is not, for instance, a necessary condition of slavery, nor a desirable one, that parents should be separated from children, or husbands from wives; but the institution of war, against which people declaim with less violence, effects such separations—not unfrequently in a very permanent manner. To press a sailor, seize a white youth by conscription for a soldier, or carry off a black one for a labourer, may all be right acts or wrong ones, according to needs and circumstances. It is wrong to scourge a man unnecessarily. So it is to shoot him. Both must be done on occasion; and it is better and kinder to flog a man to his work, than to leave him idle till he robs, and flog him afterwards. . . .<sup>1</sup>

“If, however, by slavery, instead of absolute compulsion, is meant *the purchase, by money*, of the right of compulsion, such purchase is necessarily made whenever a portion of any territory is transferred, for money, from one monarch to another; which has happened frequently enough in history, without it being supposed that the inhabitants of the districts so transferred became therefore slaves.

“The fact is that slavery is not a political institution at all, *but an inherent, natural and eternal inheritance* of a large portion of the human race—to whom, the more you give of their own free will, the more slaves they will make of themselves. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The problem of slavery is, in fact, for Ruskin, inseparably connected with the problem of mastership: and this, in turn, resolves itself into the question of providence or improvidence in the individual. The man who is consistently and intelligently provident, finds himself eventually able to command the services of the habitually improvident. But the power of the provident over the improvident depends not upon their essential qualities, but upon their relative numbers and on the modes of agreement between one class and the other, by the existing scale of wages.

The accidental level of wages is a variable function of the number of provident and idle persons in the world, of the enmity between them as classes, and of the agreement between those of the same class. It depends, in fact, upon moral conditions. Where the rich are entirely selfish, it is in their interest that the number of the poor should be as great as they can restrain, and the gulf between the two classes steadily widen: with the result that revolution or civil war inevitably follows. For the great law that governs a competitive society is that success signifies so much victory over your neighbour as to obtain the direction of his work and take the profits of it.

In a well conducted state, on the other hand, the collection of such profits would be only from those who would have misused them, and

<sup>1</sup> *Munera Pulveris: Works*, vol. 17, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

the profits would be used to benefit the classes who created them.

Moreover, the truly wise man would discover what income is necessary to him, and be content to earn this amount only, and spare himself unnecessary labour in order to ensure himself freedom for things more important than the earning of money.

But modern society has made the acquisition of wealth an end in itself: and not until it realises that labour employed to produce food, house room, clothes and fuel contributes to the wealth of society; and labour employed in unnecessary service and the production of unnecessary luxuries impoverishes it, can the distress of a population be alleviated.

## 7

The almost perverse misunderstanding which Ruskin's papers in *Fraser's* aroused not only in the press, but amongst acquaintances and friends, is amply illustrated by a letter written by W. J. Stillman to William Rossetti on 16 June, 1863: "The immediate need of my writing is to have you send me a copy of *Fraser*, with the absurd (they say) defence of slavery, in which Ruskin has been committing a *felo de se*, I think they call it. What in the world could have possessed him to do such a thing? Does he know anything about slavery, having never seen a slave? or does he by abstract reasoning prove a falsehood? or that he believes it, which is the same thing with him. I'd like to put the *argumentum ad hominem* to him, make him my nigger for three months, to show him what an abstraction may be worth. But do send me the article, that I may measure for myself the present deviation of the compass, and find where our friend North Pole has got to. What a pity it is that Ruskin did not see years ago that nobody was affected by his speculations, and that, in general, opinions and theories go for breath, and that substantial positive facts are the only Archimedes' fulcrum! All the influence he ever gained was based on his having observed certain facts, and he is now destroying it by the most fantastical and baseless vagaries. . . . It grieves me much that he will destroy the influence he might have in spheres where he has knowledge, by dabbling with things of which he can know nothing. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Such a letter, coming from a Yankee during the American Civil War, is understandable enough: but it is symptomatic of the crass mentality that refuses to admit that industrial conditions produced by a system of *laissez faire* inevitably create a slavery far more ruthless than an established serfdom in a country where the majority of serf owners are tolerably good masters. At least a slave or a serf is fed and housed for his labour. In modern civilised Europe, he was often not only denied labour, but neither fed nor housed.

<sup>1</sup> *Rossetti Papers, 1862-70*, p. 26.

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## Chapter III

1. *Winnington: difficult relations with his father: regrets for the past: death of John James.* 2. *C. A. Howell—adventurer: Ruskin's attitude to charity: a strange death.* 3. *Ruskin finances Octavia Hill's slum improvement schemes.*

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I

WHEN Ruskin returned to England in the summer of 1863, he still found the conditions at Denmark Hill more than he could endure for very long. His father's gloom at his political-economical heresies, and his mother's lamentations that he had been perverted by Carlyle and Colenso, followed him from meal to meal and from room to room. "I am still very unwell," he wrote to Norton on 30 July, "and tormented between the longing for rest and for lovely life, and the sense of the terrific call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help—though it seems to me as the voice of a river of blood which can but sweep me down in the midst of its black clots, helpless. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Very soon he retired to the more congenial atmosphere of Winnington Hall, whither he now sent a good many of his most valued personal possessions. Still deeply distressed at the failure of his recent work, and his lost religious convictions, it is evident that he was trying as well as he could, in an extremely difficult situation, to maintain equable, friendly and even deferential relations with his father. "I promised you to publish no more letters without letting you see them," he wrote from Winnington on 23 November, apropos a short note he had written to the *Weekly Review*, "so just glance over this and send it or not as you like—I rather think you will *not* like, and I daresay you are quite right. I cannot possibly write now in a proper temper of anything, or to anything, clerical. . . . It is curious that I feel older and sadder, very much, in now looking at these young children—and they are so beautiful and so good, and I am not good, considering the advantages I've had, by any means. The weary longing to begin life over again, and the sense of fate forever forbidding it, here or hereafter, is terrible. . . ."<sup>2</sup> "I *have* quite given up all thoughts of that house in Switzerland now," he wrote again three weeks later, "though my doing so indicates a certain hopelessness and abandonment of all old thoughts and ways which would be little likely to serve me for church-building. I could build a beautiful little museum—or gallery—I could not build a church—most deeply do I wish I could. And it would be wrong

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 1, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 23.11.1863: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 458.

in me that you or my mother could suffer the pain of knowing assuredly and clearly how irrevocably that is impossible; and yet, so long as you think that my present ways and words are things of the surface, not of the deep, how can we in anything understand each other? . . .

"It is really very hard upon you that my courses of thought have now led me out of the way of fame—and into that of suffering—for it is a dark world enough, towards the close of life, with my creed. One thing, however, I wish you could put out of your mind—that either Carlyle, Colenso or Froude, much less anyone less than they, have had the smallest share in this change. Three years ago, long before Colenso was heard of, I had definitely refused to have anything more to do with the religious teaching in this school: my promises to Mrs. La Touche would never have been made if I had thought it likely any such stir would be caused thus early, as Colenso has excited, but I was *then* far beyond the point at which he is standing now."<sup>1</sup>

The following day, in another long letter to John James, Ruskin once more combined affectionate reassurances with the frank accusations of past mistakes that he still felt had been the cause of so much unnecessary havoc in his life. ". . . Though you think me so weak in indulging regrets of the past, the fact is, my main mistake is perhaps attributing a quite natural dullness to *illness*. I have always been so able until now to shake off regret and amuse myself with work of some sort, that now, when my mountains and cathedrals fail me, and I find myself feeling dull in a pine forest or a country town, I directly think I must be dying. Those extracts you sent me from St. Olav's are excellent—but you see the first implies that 'people of more ardent temperament *are* crushed by dead hopes'. It is not that we have not the will to work, but that the work exhausts us after the distress. I stopped at the *Bishop's Castle* to draw, and if I could have drawn well, should have been amused, but the vital energy fails (after an hour or two) which used to last one all day, and then for the rest of the day one is apt to think of dying, and of the 'days that are no more'. It is vain to fight against this—a man may as well fight with a prison wall. The remedy is only in time, and gradual work with proper rest. Life properly understood and regulated would never be subject to trials of the kind. Men ought to be severely disciplined and exercised in the sternest way in daily life—they should learn to lie on stone beds and eat black soup, but they should never have their hearts broken—a noble heart, once broken, never mends,—the best you can do is to rivet it with iron and plaster the cracks over—the blood never flows rightly again. The two terrific mistakes which Mama and you involuntarily fell into were the exact reverse in *both ways*—you fed me effeminately and luxuriously to that extent that I actually now could not travel in rough countries without taking a cook with

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 15.12.1863; *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 459-60.



me!—but you thwarted me in all the earnest fire and passion of life. About Turner you never knew how much you thwarted me—for I thought it was my duty to be thwarted—it was the religion that led me all wrong there; if I had had courage and knowledge enough to insist on having my own way resolutely, you would now have had me in happy health, loving you twice as much (for, depend upon it, love taking much of its own way, a fair share, is in generous people all the brighter for it, and full of energy for the future)—and of power of self-denial: now, my power of *duty* has been exhausted in vain, and I am forced for life's sake to indulge myself in all sorts of selfish ways, just when a man ought to be knit for the duties of middle life by the good success of his youthful life. No life ought to have *phantoms* to lay. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

But Ruskin's painful difficulties with an adoring father whom he loved deeply were not to endure much longer. He went back to Denmark Hill shortly before Christmas; and on the second of March, his father died. Ruskin wrote the details a week later to his old friend William MacDonald, whom he had not seen for many years. “The death was sudden—and not sudden. My father read me two superb letters on business on Saturday evening—no, Sunday morning, the 27th Feb., at half-past one, to my intense disgust, for I was dog tired, having been out at dinner and detained by long and curious talk afterwards; however, having long experience in practical lying I managed to make him think I enjoyed one of them. The other, I am sorry to say, I got drowsy over, which he seeing, got up and bade me good night. He came down on Sunday morning evidently so much not himself that I said to him, ‘O father, let me bring down my things out of the study and sit beside you this morning in case you want anything, for you ought not to run about as you do usually.’ This he assented to at once, which frightened me, for he was usually very tiresome and obstinate in such things, and wouldn't be looked after; however, I brought down a coin of Arethusa . . . and began drawing it. Presently I wanted a softer pencil, and ran up to fetch one. I heard my father follow me upstairs, go into his room, and lock the door. He stayed longer than usual and so on. He never spoke a rational word more, but took till Thursday in dying slowly and (the doctors say) very curiously. One thing struck me. To all intents and purposes he was dead on Wednesday evening, but his heart went on beating under my hand till Thursday morning at half-past eleven, the breath continuing by sheer force of the circulation, and stopping for two hours before the last for seventeen seconds at a time, and then beginning again with a gasp. This six or seven times over, while the heart held its own pace all the while. . . .”<sup>2</sup> “He died, I should say, some time on the Tuesday night,” he told Henry Acland in a similarly

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.12.1863: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 460–1.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 9.3.1864: J. H. Whitehouse, *Ruskin the Prophet*, pp. 131–2.

long letter. "The pitifullest thing to look at was a resolved effort he made to brush his teeth that (Tuesday) morning, partially succeeding." And to Acland, in the same letter, who had evidently taken the opportunity to make some tactless remarks upon the difficult relationship which was now over, he wrote bluntly: "When you said to me some few months ago that you had always thought I was under a peculiar blessing because of my carrying myself kindly to my parents—and when in the Highlands you told me that you thought I lived the life of an Egyptian slave with them—you were in each case just as wrong as you are now in supposing that I ever spoke so as to cause my father much sorrow; but you have certainly chosen a curious time to say what you thought in *this* instance. If (as I suppose is always the case) death invariably makes us remember what we have done wrong to the dead, and forget what we did faithfully to them, I think our friends may generally leave Death to give his own somewhat rude messages in his own words. His voice is quite loud enough, considering the peculiar advantages also of the four sounding boards of his pulpit.

"I was surprised, certainly, as I held my father in my arms during the last day and night of delirium (which were, in fact, merely twenty-four hours of dissolution. . . .) I *was* surprised to feel how much light was thrown on all the occasions, and they were numberless, on which I might have given my father pleasure by the mere expression of my love for him, and never did. For the pain I have given him—*much*, only in cases where it was not my fault, but error—I feel bitter regret; it was never given without more in myself, a hundred-fold; but for the pleasure I have *not* given him, I shall mourn in the past, as whenever anything happens that would have rejoiced him I shall mourn in the future."<sup>1</sup> "You are 'one that hath had losses'," he added in another letter two days later. "But you never have had—nor with all your medical experience have you ever, probably, seen—the loss of a father who would have sacrificed his life for his son, and yet forced his son to sacrifice his life to him, and sacrifice it in vain. It is an exquisite piece of tragedy altogether—very much like *Lear*, in a ludicrous commercial way—Cordelia remaining unchanged—and her friends writing to her afterwards—wasn't she sorry for the pain she had given her father by not speaking when she should?"<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin, who hated funerals, buried his father in the quietest manner that was fitting. He even persuaded his mother to forego the satisfaction of a widow's cap, and to relieve the sombre magnificence of her mourning with a diamond and emerald brooch. Upon a simple tombstone, he caused to be engraved as an abiding epitaph:

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 7.3.1864: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 468-70.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 9.3.1864: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 471.

"Here rests from the day's well sustained burden,  
 John James Ruskin,  
 born in Edinburgh, May 18th, 1775.  
 He died in his home in London, March 2nd, 1864.  
 He was an entirely honest merchant,  
 and his memory is, to all who keep it, dear and helpful.  
 His son, whom he loved to the uttermost  
 and taught to speak truth, says this of him."<sup>1</sup>

## 2

After the death of John James, Ruskin became a man of very substantial means. Except for the Denmark Hill house and £37,000 which he had bequeathed to his wife, his father had left him, without reservations of any kind, the whole of his fortune, which now amounted to £120,000 in cash, and property and pictures valued at an additional £10,000. Thus the strange old man, so pitilessly shrewd in all financial matters during his life, so cautious in expenditure that his gifted son was always restrained in purchases of works of art whose rapid increase in value would inevitably have enriched them both, now gave him a completely free hand in the management of a large fortune, without ever having trained him to manage even the small allowance that he had placed at his disposal at twenty-one.

Ruskin, deeply embarrassed, in his present mood, by the possession of so much money, immediately began to disburthen himself of it both voluntarily and involuntarily. He promptly lost nearly £20,000 by selling 3% stocks and buying defective 5% mortgages instead. He gave £17,000 to various members of his father's family whose names had not been mentioned in the will: and inevitably became a prey to beggars of every description, from those who solicited his donations to well known and irreproachable charities, to those who sought to take the meanest advantage of his credulity and good nature. To help him in the partial dispensation of his excessive wealth, Ruskin employed a young man by the name of C. A. Howell, who was later to achieve extreme notoriety in artistic circles, to whom it is said he paid a salary of £300.

C. A. Howell, indeed, was the archetype of the swash-buckling gentleman adventurer. As handsome as a fine Velasquez, with a most beautiful voice and a charm of manner that few men or women of talent could resist, his life consisted in a series of the strangest liaisons and adventures which were exceeded only by the dramatic strangeness of his death. The son of an English drawing master who had lived in Lisbon and married a Portuguese girl of whom nothing is known, he had been convicted of card-sharpping at Oporto in 1857 at the age of seventeen, and promptly shipped off to an uncle at Darlington. Life

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. lxxvii.

at Darlington, however, to a young man of such dazzling imagination and appearance, had seemed singularly devoid both of opportunities and of romance, and very soon he had made his way to London, and come under the influence of Rossetti, who found his braggadocio and his conversation quite irresistible. The *blague* with which he concealed his past indiscretions was certainly entertaining. There were intriguing hints of a secret mission being undertaken for high but nameless persons in Portugal: of daring participation in the Orsini conspiracy and a sensational escape across the Channel: even of having lived in Morocco in his youth as the sheikh of a tribe. Claiming to be a descendant of Boabdil el Chico (for which reason Rossetti called him "the cheeky"), he would sometimes wear a broad red ribbon across his short front which he gave out to be a Portuguese decoration hereditary in the family. William Morris, however, when asked what order it stood for, bluntly replied that he supposed Howell had stolen it from someone.

The Munchausen of the Pre-Raphaelite circle (as Madox Brown called him), he was honoured also by being the subject of several of Rossetti's pungent limericks.

"There's a Portuguese person called Howell,  
Who lays on his lies with a trowel;  
When I goggle my eyes,  
And start with surprise,  
'Tis at the monstrous big lies told by Howell."<sup>1</sup>

This, dissatisfied with the last line, he later altered to:

"There's a Portuguese person named Howell,  
Who lays on his lies with a trowel:  
Should he give over lying,  
'Twill be when he's dying,  
For living is lying with Howell."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the reactions of his circle to this curious character are revealing. William Rossetti wrote of him: "As a salesman—with his open manner, winning address, and his exhaustless gift of amusing talk, not innocent of high colouring and of actual blague, Howell was unsurpassable."<sup>2</sup>—Whistler: "The wonderful man, the genius, the Gil Blas-Robinson Crusoe hero out of his proper time, the creature of top boots and plumes, splendidly flamboyant, the real hero of the Picaresque novel, forced by modern conditions to other adventures, and along other roads."<sup>3</sup> Of his flair for works of art, that painter would say "he knew them and made himself indispensable by knowing them. He was of the greatest service to Rossetti, he helped Watts to sell his pictures and to raise his prices; he acted as artistic adviser

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti: *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 495.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to W. Allingham*, ed. G. B. Hill, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, p. 111.

to Lord Carlisle. He had the gift of intimacy; he was at once a friend, on closest terms of confidence. He introduced everybody to everybody else, and it was easier to get involved with Howell than to get rid of him." Swinburne, however, referred to him bluntly as "the polecat Howell: the vilest wretch I ever came across".<sup>1</sup> To Hall Caine, he was "a daring, reckless, unscrupulous soldier of fortune, very clever, very plausible, very persuasive, but totally destitute of delicate feeling, and almost without the moral sense";<sup>2</sup> and by the time Graham Robertson was acquainted with him, "he had in his time been almost everybody's bosom friend and usually their private secretary. The secretary-ships always come to an abrupt end owing to financial complications; the friendships often lingered surprisingly long. He always seemed to have been extraordinarily attractive to 'portable property' such as pictures, furniture, and bric-a-brac; they flew to him, and adhered, as steel to the magnet. No one knew what he possessed or did not possess, nobody could exactly remember when or why they had bestowed on him various *objets d'art*, and he had several times excited curiosity by pseudo-posthumous sales to which his bewildered friends had flocked in the faint hope that their long-lost and half-forgotten treasures might come to the surface, which they seldom, if ever, did."<sup>3</sup> More bluntly, the *Ashley Library Catalogue* states that he earned his living by selling as genuine spurious Old Masters: and, indeed, there was a famous occasion when Rossetti was discovered foaming at the mouth and incoherent with rage at having been deceived by a copy of one of his own drawings, complete with monogram, which had been faked by his friend.

Hall Caine tells this story of him: "One day he told Ruskin that a certain friend of theirs was in despair for the want of a large sum—I think a thousand pounds. Ruskin promptly sat down and wrote a cheque for the amount, and gave it to his secretary. Time passed, Ruskin heard nothing more of the money, almost forgot all about it, and he and his secretary parted. But calling one day on his friend he found him tramping the studio in a state of delirium.

"'What's amiss?' said Ruskin.

"'Why, that scoundrel and thief has been getting money in my name, saying I sent him to borrow it.'

"Ruskin dropped his head but said nothing. The painter's suspicions were aroused.

"'Has he ever borrowed from you?'

"'Perhaps—I'm not sure—I forget,' said Ruskin, looking embarrassed and ashamed."

This painter, if the story is true, was probably Burne-Jones, whom Ruskin continued to help in every way he could, as formerly he had

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was*, pp. 187-8.

helped Rossetti, by buying such of his work as he could not sell elsewhere; and, when his paintings came up for sale, bidding for them with the object of selling them again and presenting the painter with any profits that might accrue from the transaction.

No trick was too bold, indeed, for the fascinating Howell. He boasted that he had written much of Ruskin's earlier work for him: he stole prints of Whistler engravings almost under his very eyes: he used to paste the most intimate and important letters from his friends into a large scrapbook, and pawn it when he was in low water. It is said that when Ruskin was asked why he employed such a man, he would look extremely embarrassed and remark that unfortunately he could not give him a character, but neither could he see his wife and family starve.

Yet two years of Howell's erratic assistance was as much as even the indulgent Ruskin could stomach; and in 1866 Howell left his employer to become literary agent to the soon disillusioned Swinburne. During this time, however, he had acted as Ruskin's agent in several naive and egregious dispensations: for although Ruskin was on occasion loud in his denunciations of indiscriminate charity, his own benevolences were singularly wayward. He had been despatched, for example, to the bird show at the Crystal Palace to give a sovereign for a canary whose owner interested Ruskin: he had been instructed to find lodgings for a poor shop-boy in whom Ruskin had discerned artistic talent, and to place him in a suitable art school: he had concluded elaborate negotiations to help a "half crazy old Frenchwoman" who had acquainted Ruskin with her dire need for the loan of twenty pounds: and at Ruskin's instigation, he had suggested subjects to the impoverished Cruickshank for illustrations for a book of fairy stories which Ruskin proposed to edit in order to help bring his work once more before the public—a scheme which eventually came to nothing.

These transactions soon became the talk of the Pre-Raphaelites. "Howell, Chapman (woodcut-illustrator) and Marks the china dealer at dinner Chelsea," William Rossetti recorded on 25 October, 1866. "A good deal of talk about Ruskin. Howell says that R.'s income is £22,000 a year, out of which he keeps only £1,500 for his own expenses. He sold the wine business for the equivalent of about £200,000, but this is paid to him as an annuity. The expenses of his books were huge—£12,000 for *The Stones of Venice*, and £25,000 for the whole lot (I think). The sales have covered the total, and yielded him a profit of £40. He lately gave £7,000 to a hard-up clergyman: a Greek woman of whom he knew nothing, applied to for him £10, and he sent £100. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And so on. And so on—statements which may well be regarded with a good deal of suspicion. Ruskin's ingenuous lavishness, indeed, led him into some very disagreeable situations. On one occasion, a mineralogist, by name Calvert, had submitted to

<sup>1</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, pp. 195-6.

him some minerals which he wished to buy. When he enquired the price, the dealer was vague, saying that he thought it was about £300, but would have to make sure. Ruskin therefore gave him a blank cheque, which Calvert later filled in for £3,000. For some reason, however, the manager of the branch where Ruskin banked was suspicious, and refused to cash the cheque. Calvert then threatened proceedings for conspiracy, and Ruskin considered taking the matter to court. Finally, a compromise was reached, and scandal avoided. In *Fors Clavigera*, years later, Ruskin admitted that he had bought a collection of minerals for a stipulated sum of £3,000 on the owner's statement of its value, which proved not to be worth £500. "I went to law about it. The lawyers charged me a thousand pounds for their own services, gave me a thousand pounds back, out of the three, and made the defendants give one another five hundred pounds' worth of minerals. On the whole, a satisfactory legal performance, but it took two years in the doing and caused me much worry. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In the end, Ruskin became exhausted with his large benevolences. As he wrote to a friend later: "It is quite one of the sorrowfullest things I see every day, that incredulity of the poor that one can really wish to help them without knowing them. But there is a reverse feeling, which is often very inconvenient—I help people a little, they get to know me, they are full of gratitude and love, then they think because they love me I must love them, that I could not be kind to them without loving them, and then they come to me at all times with their distresses, till I can't stand it any more—so don't give my name to anybody; but when you see deserving cases, help them in a moderate and necessary way, as you would if the money were your own, and I will answer it:"<sup>2</sup> and to Howell himself: "I think I shall do most ultimate good by distinctly serviceable appropriation of funds, not by saving here and there an unhappy soul. . . ."<sup>3</sup> This, indeed, had been his consistent opinion for many years. As he had written to Thackeray in 1860, "I think there are many people who will relieve hopeless distress for me who will give help at a hopeful pinch, and when I have choice I always give where I think the money will be fruitful rather than merely helpful. I would lecture for a school when I would not for a distressed author, and would have helped de Marvy to perfect his invention, but not—unless I had no other object—his widow after he was gone. In a word, I like to prop the falling more than to feed the fallen."<sup>4</sup> As he was to write again years later to Elizabeth Gilbert who hoped to arouse his interest in the blind . . . "I deeply sympathise with the objects of the institution over which you preside. But one of my main principles of work is that everyone must do their best and spend their all in their

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 76: *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 100–101.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, undated, ? 1865: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 498–9.

<sup>3</sup> Letter published in *New Review*, March 1892, p. 283.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Ritchie, *Records of Tompkinson, Ruskin and Browning* (1882), p. 126.

own work, and mine is with a much lower race of sufferers than you plead for—with those who 'have eyes and see not'."<sup>1</sup>

Apparently Ruskin continued to have erratic relations with Howell for several years; and, it is said (much to Georgiana's horror—she hated him), even established him in a house at Fulham so that he could keep a friendly eye upon Burne-Jones.

When Rossetti, tended by the young Hall Caine, lay dying, years later, Howell arrived one day quite unexpectedly and was received "with the utmost cordiality. He was a somewhat battered person, with the face of a whipped cab-horse, but so clever, so humorous, so audacious, that Rossetti's flagging spirits were wonderfully awakened by his visit.

"And what are you doing now, Charlie?" said Rossetti.

"Buying horses for the King of Portugal," said the soldier of fortune, and then Rossetti laughed until he nearly rolled out of his seat."<sup>2</sup>

It is scarcely surprising that this somewhat sinister figure came to a sensational end: he was found one morning with his throat cut and a ten-shilling piece wedged between his clenched teeth in a gutter outside a public-house in Chelsea. Taken to the Home Hospital in Fitzroy Square, he died a few days later, of what was called on his death certificate, in order to avoid a scandal, pneumonic phthisis.

To Graham Robertson, who had, with Ellen Terry, attended the sale of his effects, Whistler remarked pensively as he studied a catalogue: "That was Rossetti's—that's mine—that's Swinburne's. . . . He was really wonderful, you know. You couldn't keep anything from him, and you always did exactly as he told you. That picture," pointing to *Rose Corder*, "is, I firmly believe, the only thing he ever paid for in his life: I was amazed when I got the cheque, and I only remembered some months afterwards that he had paid me out of my own money which I had lent to him the week before."<sup>3</sup>

### 3

More far-reaching in effect than any of his casual dispensations was Ruskin's financing of Octavia Hill in her projects for slum improvements. Their friendship had survived unaltered now for ten years. Ruskin was still the charming and pathetic genius to be admired, copied, obeyed, consoled. Octavia was still the sympathetic and gallant young girl with a fine understanding of social service. But now, in addition, she realised not only precisely how, if she had backing, she could apply her knowledge with effective result; but, sure of Ruskin's sympathy, and knowing that he was anxious to find

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 2.9.1871: Frances Martin, *Elizabeth Gilbert and her Work for the Blind*, p. 256

<sup>2</sup> Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was*, p. 190.



good uses to which to put much of the money left him by his father, she decided to apply to him for practical help.

Thus, one day when she had gone to Denmark Hill for an impromptu drawing lesson, she had eagerly told him something of her ideas for reclaiming slum dwellings; and, emboldened by his interest in her projects, two days later sent him a preliminary description of how she would set to work if she were able. "Yes, it will delight me to help you in this; but I should like you to begin very quietly and temperately and to go on gradually," Ruskin told her in reply. "My father's executors are old friends, and I don't want to discomfort them by lashing out suddenly into a number of plans. In about three days from now I shall know more precisely what I am about. Meantime, get your ideas clear and believe me you will give me one of the greatest pleasures as yet possible to me, by enabling me to be of use in this particular manner and to these ends."<sup>1</sup> "I write expecting your warm sympathy in a much beloved plan that now Ruskin promises to help me to carry out," Octavia Hill wrote to a friend a few days later. "We are to have a house near here (with a little ground to make a playground and drying ground), and this house is to be put to rights, for letting to my poor friends among the working-class women. We are to begin very quietly, and go on gradually; but I see such bright things that may (that almost must) grow out of it. . . . I am so happy that I can hardly walk on the ground."<sup>2</sup>

So Octavia began to look for a place suitable to her designs, and after great difficulty found three houses in Paradise Place, near her school in Nottingham Place, which she hoped Ruskin would buy.

"Shall I tell you about it all?" she enquired, when she went to tell him of what she hoped to do.

"No, tell me about the best plan you know."

"But that is so expensive."

"Then tell me about the second best."

Octavia Hill proceeded to do so.

"Is this the plan you want?"

"No, there is another, but it would really be far too much. It is the very plan for us, but the lease must be bought, and they ask £1,500: the money would be a dead loss."

"Very well. Let it be so then. I will tell my lawyers to attend to it."<sup>3</sup>

It was Ruskin's suggestion that these tenement houses should be made to pay, and "not to come to a smash", and he receive 5% on his capital outlay; because he hoped that, were the scheme a success, others would be prepared to invest their money in a similar manner. "Who will ever hear of what I do?" Octavia Hill had replied.<sup>4</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 19.5.1864: C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill; Early Ideals*, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 190.

she nevertheless knew well that with careful management she could create the decent homes for the poor that she wished to see; and still make her slums a paying proposition.

A year after the first purchase, she persuaded Ruskin to buy for her another row of cottages. They were derelict and dilapidated, but there was space for a tiny garden; and in time, with her devotion, skill and energy, these too were reclaimed from being slums of the most offensive order, to decent dwellings where respectable work-people could live, at moderate rent, in cleanliness and decency. "I think no one who has not experienced it can fully realise the almost awed sense of joy with which one enters upon such a possession, conscious of having the power to set it even partially in order," Octavia Hill wrote, while faced with the problem of civilising tenants who seemed at first in every way to be subhuman, and took a malicious joy in destroying many of the first amenities that she supplied.

To another friend she entered into details of her latest activity. "Ruskin has bought six more houses, and in a densely populated neighbourhood. Some houses in the court were reported unfit for human habitation, and have been converted into warehouses, the rest are inhabited by a desperate and forlorn set of people, wild, dirty, violent, ignorant as I have ever seen. Here, pulling down a few stables, we have cleared a bit of ground, fenced it and gravelled it; and on Tuesday last, opened it as a playground for quite poor girls. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

This social work, which Octavia Hill conducted without any salary, did not prevent Ruskin from continuing the financial help he had given her while she was copying for him.

"I offered to resign my salary, urging that the house would take so much of my time," Octavia wrote to a friend. "'As you like,' he said, 'but it is yours now, as long as you want it, for you are doing some of the work that I ought to do.' 'I'm afraid I shall always want it, there is so much to do.' 'Then always have it,' he said, with one of his sweetest smiles, setting me instantly at ease. In his speaking of the reasons for giving it, he said that it was partly to enable me to do, and partly not to do the work, that I might keep well and useful."<sup>2</sup>

Before long, Octavia Hill considered writing an account of her work and her aims, and submitting it to Ruskin for his approval. "I should *like* to read it, but may not be able, and there is no need," Ruskin replied. "State your own views in beginning this thing; say that I furnished you with the means in order to prove and practise one of the first principles of my political economy: that proper use of money would give proper interest, and that no one could other than *criminally* take more. Make the thing short, but put in *some* distinct and interesting stories about your tenants, and I doubt not the immense

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, p. 163.

good you will do, and probably induce others to do.”<sup>1</sup> Four years later, in 1870, Ruskin wrote on this subject again. “I have read your report with great interest, but I would ask your permission to add a few words to it—in order to mark more clearly the principles it involves, which I do not think all its readers would see at once, in its present form. It dwells much for instance on the necessity of more personal intercourse and sympathy with the poor. I acknowledge the need to the uttermost. But the closest intercourse and the kindest feelings would be useless without right methods of action; and right methods of action will always be useful—however narrow or unsympathetic the feelings.”<sup>2</sup> He also took exception to Octavia’s emphatic references to the idea of “raising the poor without gifts”. “. . . The great principle on which we began our work together, namely, that you should be able to let the poor rooms at a fixed rent, which should never be raised upon them, and which if they continued to pay they were as sure of their house as if it were their own—the landlord himself engaging not to sell the property over their heads at any price, however advantageous to himself, so that they might set about any improvements possible in their dwellings with a good heart, and also on terms which, if I am not mistaken, enabled you to give them two rooms for the rent, which under the pressure exercised on them by ordinary ‘supply and demand’ rent taking, they had been forced to pay for one. This principle, which is, is it not, for the most part ignored in your late reports, involves, it appears to me, a very considerable amount of ‘Gift’. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, their divergence of views had, as yet, occasioned no breach of mutual sympathy. “It has been strange how, lately, Ruskin has turned back to me,” Octavia Hill wrote to a friend shortly after his mother’s death. “I have had such letters from him, asking for my opinions on the triumph of good, and the life after death. I do not think that words, still less letters, are of very much use, still one is glad to say what little one can.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 272.

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## Chapter IV

1. *Margaret Ruskin—despot: Joan Agnew: the eccentricities of a widower: the breach with Rossetti.* 2. *George MacDonald.* 3. *Mr. and Mrs. William Cowper.* 4. *Rose's illness: adolescence in Ireland: reunion in London: the end of happiness.* 5. *The La Touches' objections to their daughter's marriage with Ruskin: trust between Ruskin and Rose: Ruskin begs Mrs. Cowper to intervene: the La Touches prohibit all communication: Ruskin urges Mrs. Cowper to go to Harristown: Mrs. Cowper gives Ruskin hope: Rose's letter to Mrs. Cowper: she sends Ruskin a token of affection.*

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I

WHEN John James Ruskin died, old Mrs. Ruskin was eighty-three; and until her death seven years later, continued to rule her household with an unrelenting despotism that made life increasingly burdensome for a son who still submitted without a murmur to the established rule of the house. Although Ruskin was soon able to find for his mother a suitable companion in the form of a distant cousin, Joan Agnew, a pretty, unsophisticated and sweet-natured girl of just seventeen, to whom the old lady took an immediate fancy, he himself spent much of his time at Denmark Hill for the next two years, reading to his mother from the edifying but to him pernicious religious works that pleased her, or from *Cranford*, as her inclination dictated. And the older she grew, the more disagreeable life at Denmark Hill became. Visited, now, by a great many distinguished people who paid her deference only because of her late husband's wealth or her son's genius, Mrs. Ruskin would assert her own opinions with a formidable tenacity, and frequently tell Ruskin, in the presence of guests, that he was talking like a fool. If there were young visitors in the house, and Ruskin wished to take them into town during the evening to see a play, old Mrs. Ruskin's permission always had first to be asked, and sometimes she would take a perverse delight in withholding it. More distressing, at forty-five, and without a home of his own, Ruskin still had no place where he could be sure of welcoming his friends without interference. When, a little later, Charles Eliot Norton, who had extended him frequent and generous invitations to visit him in the States, came over to England on a visit, Ruskin was unable to invite him and his wife to stay at Denmark Hill because his mother was slightly indisposed, and the necessary arrangements could not be made without disturbing her elaborate dispositions. To say nothing of the fact that all his pictures were still covered up on Sundays with special screens in order to preserve

effectively the holiness of the Sabbath. To visitors, however, Mrs. Ruskin could be most agreeable; and Octavia Hill found her a "stately, kind, grand old lady, very like a queen in her dignity, who received her very warmly, and told her of her spinning and sewing, and of her forty-seven years of married life, during which she had never but once drunk tea away from her husband". "She is nearly blind, and cannot walk at all, but is quite the mistress and head of the house, knows where everything is and should be, and considers that she takes care of Joan, and not Joan of her."<sup>1</sup>

In the sphere of family affection, his mother's place was slowly to be taken by his cousin, to whom he was to write later: "With you I am always now at rest—being sure that you know how I value you, and that whatever I say, or don't say to you, you won't mind; besides all the help that I get from your knowledge of all my little ways and inner thoughts."<sup>2</sup> "I am so constantly in sadness that your beautiful letter can hardly make me sorry," he wrote to her again in 1873; "but it makes me feel more resolution to be what I can to you, always, to the best of my power. Not that 'resolution' is ever needed to be kind to *you*, but sometimes—to be kind to myself, for your sake. Now that I must, so far as is in me, be mother as well as father to you, I must strive to have peace in my own heart, that I may preserve it in yours."<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly the death of his father affected Ruskin very deeply. He had always treated him less as a parent than as an older and most valued friend, and there was never until the end of his life anyone to take his place. But it was not only his father that Ruskin lost at this time. He was also soon to lose Rossetti. Since Lizzie's death, he had hoped to draw closer to him. "I do trust that henceforward I may be more with you, as I am able now better to feel your great powers of mind, and am myself more in need of the kindness with which they are joined,"<sup>4</sup> he had written to him from Milan in 1862; and he had even suggested that he might become one of Rossetti's tenants in that large house in Cheyne Walk which he had taken shortly after his wife's death, and in which he was to live for many years in strange conditions of princely squalor, surrounded by poets and artists, blue pots, elaborate bric-a-brac, and an almost sensational menagerie of animals. Gone forever, now, for Rossetti, were the days of exuberant gaiety—the days when a heterogeneous collection of his brilliant friends would be invited to Chatham Place with the casual message—"Nothing but oysters, and come in the seediest of clothes"—the days when he light-heartedly called pawning his pet belongings "avuncularising", and dining out in state—"togs and resignation". When, at Lizzie's death, he had placed in her coffin, as a gesture of atonement and

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May (?) 1868: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 549.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 15.4.1873: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 13.

heroic renunciation, the manuscript of his unpublished poems, he had surrendered to her also all the best of his own past. "What a supreme man is Rossetti! Why is he not some great exiled king, that we might give our lives in trying to restore him to his kingdom."<sup>1</sup> So the enthusiastic Philip Bourke Marston was to write years later to Oliver Madox Brown. But to others who had known and loved him in his youth, Rossetti, until his death, was to become more and more a king of shreds and patches. Now that he had discovered, as he told Frederick Shields, that "women were ever so much nicer when they had lost their virtue",<sup>2</sup> and his rooms were haunted by his "dear elephant", the plump, beautiful, good-natured and unscrupulous Fanny, he settled down into an easy, casual, domineering manner of existence that alienated many of his former friends. For years he had been estranged both from Millais and from Hunt. Millais resented his friendship with Ruskin, which, since his marriage to Effie, he considered both dishonourable and disloyal to himself; and Hunt had been irritated, and finally outraged, by his continual philandering with Annie Miller, the beautiful young girl whom he had been educating with the intention that ultimately she should become his wife. Nevertheless, Rossetti, "one of the men most dependent on company that I have ever known", as Stillman once called him, was still surrounded by several of the most brilliant intellects of the day. Those blue pots which, by 1864, "baffled description altogether, while the imagination which could conceive them would deserve a tercentenary celebration",<sup>3</sup> the pet wombat that was brought into the dining-room with coffee and cigars, and Rossetti's own curiously dramatic and pungent personality, still attracted to him all manner of new associates. Very soon, indeed, the strange eccentricities of the painter who lived in Cheyne Walk and never showed his pictures at public exhibitions were to become almost legendary. The variety and numbers of his pets exceeded even the wildest excesses of imagination. Within a very few years he had a Pomeranian puppy named Punch, an Irish deerhound named Wolf, two barn owls, Jessie and Bobby, a large collection of rabbits, hedgehogs, white mice, dormice, squirrels and moles, chameleons, green lizards and Japanese salamanders, a jackdaw, a varied assortment of owls, Australian kingfishers, parrakeets and peacocks, a talking grey parrot, two successive wombats—of one of which Rossetti was to write excitedly to his brother, despite the fact that one day at dinner the creature descended from the epergne during an animated discussion and consumed the entire contents of a valuable box of cigars, that it was "a Joy, a Triumph, a Delight, a Madness"—a marmot, a woodchuck, armadilloes, wallabies, a racoon, a deer, and several jackasses and kangaroos. The only reason that

<sup>1</sup> F. M. Hueffer, *Rossetti*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 49.

deterred him from adding a lion to this collection, which he learned was to be sold cheap, was that it would have been necessary to heat his garden with hot-water pipes over the winter in order to keep the animal alive. There is even a tale of him contemplating the purchase of an elephant. "Whatever can you want with an elephant?" asked Browning. "O," said Rossetti, "I mean him to clean the windows. Then, when strangers pass the house, they will see the elephant cleaning the windows, and ask: 'Who lives in that house?' And they will be told, 'Oh, that's a painter called Rossetti.' So they will say: 'I think I should like to buy one of that man's pictures'—and so they will ring, and come in and buy my pictures."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Rossetti's personal conduct was becoming increasingly extravagant. At moments of reason, he might write, as he did to C. E. Norton on 9 January, 1862: "In all earnestness I am truly and bitterly ashamed of my neglect in your regard. It is one of those things which I would not have believed of myself if it had been foretold to me beforehand; and yet so it has been. No excuse of other pressing occupation or distractions can in the least mitigate the unpardonable nature of my conduct towards one whose good opinion I should sincerely have valued, as I may truly say I should yours, and yet have forfeited it in the most shameful way. . . . Really there is nothing but the pitiful resource of throwing myself on your forgiveness—all the meaner on my part for my knowing that you have already granted it." But on other occasions he was arrogant, violent, aggressive and even rude. There are stories of him, in moods of exasperation, hurling his precious blue and white plates at the buxom Fanny; of shouting downstairs to the servant, "Send the bloody bishop up," when some learned divine came to call; of creeping from under a heavily brocaded table when Miss Herbert paid a visit; of quarrelling with his guests with an unpardonable fury. Meredith, who had been invited, with Swinburne, to rent a room in the Cheyne Walk house, could not abide his excesses, and left the house, after a very short residence, because of a scene he had had with his host over breakfast. Meredith, so Rossetti later told Wilfred Meynell, had said something that annoyed him. "If you say that again," Rossetti threatened truculently, "I will throw this cup of tea in your face."<sup>2</sup> Meredith repeated his remark, and Rossetti threw the tea. Meredith rushed out of the house and sent for his clothes the same day.

The devoted William, intelligent, impartial and acute, early realised that "though radically good-natured", his brother "was not of what one calls an accommodating turn. His own convenience dictated his habits, and persons in his company had to adapt themselves as best they could". "He assumed the easy attitude of one born to dominate—to know his own place, and to set others in theirs,"

<sup>1</sup> Frances Horner, *Time Remembered*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> W. Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, p. 113.

he wrote on another occasion. "When once this relation between the parties was established, things went well: for my brother was a genial despot, good-natured, hearty and unassuming in manner, and only tenacious under the question at issue."<sup>1</sup> Thus, although young men like Arthur Hughes still found his manners "fascinating, enthusiastic and generous", his admirations whole-hearted, and his hatreds no less vehement, Ruskin was the last man to be subjugated by such whims: and the latent friction which had always existed between them, in these circumstances soon appeared on the surface.

Rossetti, who was far too great an egotist ever to try to understand in another anything that was not immediately apparent to his vivid intuitions, had always had a certain arrogant disdain for Ruskin's extravagances. "Ruskin's pamphlet is the most absurd thing I have read for a long while," he wrote to W. B. Scott in May 1865. "He appears to be now for the first time examining English artists' works (except merely as seeking for foils to Turner) and finds them all to take his breath away." And when Ruskin's articles had first appeared in the *Cornhill*, Rossetti had indulged in all the conventional vituperation. "As to Ruskin's ten years' rest," he told William Allingham, "I do not know about his writing, but I will certainly answer for my reading, if he only writes like his article in the *Cornhill* this month. Who could read it, or anything about such bosh!"<sup>2</sup> Thus lightly did Rossetti dismiss the most penetrating contribution to the study of sociology of his period. Nevertheless, three years later, when Ruskin was consulted by the Commission appointed to enquire into the present position of the *Royal Academy in relation to the Fine Arts*, Rossetti assured Allingham that his was the only evidence of the lot which was worth reading as original thought and insight. "Him I saw the other day, and pitched into," he concluded characteristically; "he talked such awful rubbish; but he is a dear old chap, too, and as soon as he was gone, I wrote my sorrows to him. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

But by 1865 Rossetti had fully entered into a new phase of arrogance and susceptibility that bordered upon the pathological. It was while in this frame of mind that, piqued because Ruskin was unsympathetic to his present mode of painting—he could not bear the coarseness of the roses and honeysuckles in the foreground of *Venus Verticordia*—Rossetti began to quarrel with him. Rossetti never had been able to bear criticism, even of the most friendly kind. "Don't you think that head is too large?" Morris had one day innocently enquired, when looking at one of his drawings. "I'm glad you've said that," was the painter's reply, "for I was thinking it was too small—so it must be the proper size, and just right."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of D. G. Rossetti to W. Allingham*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 76.



His grievance was a rumour that Ruskin had sold some of his drawings. Even had he done so, Rossetti, of course, could have had no reasonable complaint. But Ruskin immediately disavowed the charge with disarming amiability. "What a goose you are to go about listening to people's gossip about me! I have never parted with any of your drawings but the *Francesca*," he assured him. "I leave the *Golden Water* and *Passover* at a Girls' School (Winnington) because I go there often, and enjoy them more than if they were hanging up here—because *here* I dwell on their faults of perspective and such like. Am I so mean in money matters that I should sell Lizzie? You ought to have painted her better, and known me better: I'll give you her back any day that you're a good boy, but it will be a long while before that comes to pass."<sup>1</sup>

There followed a long correspondence of veiled recriminations on Rossetti's part, and patient explanations upon Ruskin's, concerning Ruskin's present attitude to Rossetti's work. Only a year before (1863), Ruskin had declared that he believed the Pre-Raphaelite School of Painting (centred in England, but with branches in other countries) to be the only vital and true school of painting in Europe; and its leader, Dante G. Rossetti, to be, without any compare, the greatest of English painters now living. But now Ruskin protested against Rossetti's faults in perspective because he looked upon them as "moral insolences and iniquities"<sup>2</sup> even in an average painter, and maintained that he could not bear the pain of seeing Rossetti at work as he was working now. But Rossetti, more than ever resentful of criticism, continued to harp upon his drawings at Winnington, at which Ruskin too, at last, became indignant. "You take upon you, for your *own* interest, to judge to whom I should and should not give or lend your drawings. In *your* interest only—and judging from no other person's sayings, but from my own sight—I tell you the people you associate with are ruining you. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

But although Ruskin, in reply to Rossetti's answer, said that he was grateful that these letters had been written, as they would care more for each other in future; they marked the end of any further intimate association between the two men. For Ruskin now demanded from Rossetti that he should be taken seriously, and Rossetti was by now incapable of taking anyone seriously but himself. Both egotists, it was Rossetti's egoism that was the more disastrous. Ruskin's egoism was the true egoism of the creative artist, who must, in order to fulfil the laws of his being, sacrifice everything for the sake of what he considered to be his life's work. But, great artist though he was, Rossetti's egoism was of the morbid sort that would sacrifice anyone and anything to his slightest whim. "He had a theory," his brother

<sup>1</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, pp. 132-3.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136-7.

wrote of him later, “. . . that men who have an originating gift—or, in a broad sense, what we call men of genius—are all selfish in that same mood of being self-centred. He would say it of such poets as Dante, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, or of Shakespeare if the facts of his life were fully known—of such painters as Titian, Cellini, Rembrandt, Blake and Turner.”<sup>1</sup> Thus he justified his own most spectacular excesses. Ruskin’s great tragedy now, as with most men who see more clearly than their fellows, was that there was no one about him of sufficient stature to give him the recognition that had become for him an actual need. In his last, and most eloquent letter, he clearly expressed the limitations in Rossetti that ultimately caused their whole relationship to be a tragic failure. “I am very grateful to you for this letter, and for the feelings it expresses towards me,” he wrote in utter sincerity. “I was not angry, and there was nothing in your note that needed your asking my pardon. You meant them—the first and second—just as rightly as this pretty third, and yet they conclusively showed me that we could not at present, nor for some time yet, be companions any more, though true friends, I hope, as ever.

“I am grateful for your love—but yet I do not want love. I have had boundless love from many people during my life. And in more than one case that love has been my greatest calamity. I have boundlessly *suffered* from it. But the thing, in any helpful degree, I have never been able to get, except from two women of whom I never see the only one I care for, and from Edward Jones, is ‘understanding’. . . .

“Now there are many things in which I always have acknowledged, and shall acknowledge, your superiority to me. I know it, as well as I know that St. Paul is higher than I am. There are other things in which I just as simply know that *I* am superior to you. I don’t mean in writing. You write, as you paint, better than I. I could never have written a stanza like you.

“Now in old times I did not care two straws whether you knew or acknowledged I was superior to you, or not. But now (being, as I say, irritable and ill) I do care, and I will associate with no man who does not more or less accept my own estimate of myself. For instance, Brett told me, a year ago, that a statement of mine respecting a scientific matter (which I knew *à fond* before he was born) was ‘bosh’. I told him in return he was a fool; he left the house, and I will not see him again ‘until he is wiser’.

“Now you, in the same manner, tell me ‘the faults in your drawings are not greater than those I put up with in what is about me’, and that one of my assistants is a ‘mistakenly transplanted carpenter’. And I answer—not that you are a fool, because no man is that who can design as you can—but simply that you know nothing of me, nor

<sup>1</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *His Family Letters*, vol. 1, p. 75.

of my knowledge, nor of my thoughts, nor of the sort of grasp of things I have in directions in which you are utterly powerless; and that I do not choose any more to talk to you until you can recognise my superiorities as *I* can yours.

"And this recognition, observe, is not a matter of will or courtesy. You simply do not see certain characters in me, and cannot see them: still less could you (or should I ask you to) pretend to see them. A day may come when you will be able. Then, without apology, without restraint—merely as *being* different from what you are now—come back to me, and we will be as we used to be. It is not this affair of the drawings—not this sentence—but the ways and thoughts I have seen in you ever since I knew you, coupled with the change of health in myself, which render this necessary—complicated also by a change in your own methods of work with which I have no sympathy, and which renders it impossible for me to give you the kind of praise which would give you pleasure. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But when Rossetti took him at his word, it was Ruskin, and not Rossetti, who really felt the break. At the end of 1866, one evening when William Rossetti was dining at Denmark Hill, Ruskin told him that he would like to resume his old acquaintance with his brother. William therefore suggested that he should call at Cheyne Walk, and try to avoid criticising Rossetti's work too harshly. This Ruskin did, evidently expressing "great admiration" for the *Beatrice in a Death Trance*: and William recorded that it all went off most cordially. But Rossetti made no further response, and the two men did not meet again until September 1868, when Ruskin again called at Cheyne Walk, in the hope of interesting Rossetti in his new social schemes. But Rossetti showed no response; and Ruskin made no further overtures. It was the last time they ever met. "The truth is," said William Morris after Rossetti's death, "he cared for nothing but individual and personal matters, chiefly of course in relation to art and literature; but he would take abundant trouble to help any one person who was in distress of mind or body, but the evils of any mass of people he couldn't bring his mind to bear upon."<sup>2</sup>

For all his superficial geniality, Rossetti had no real gift for friendship, and ended by quarrelling with, or becoming estranged from, nearly all his former friends. "He was impossible as a boon companion," Millais was to tell his son—"so dogmatic and so irritable when opposed." "My last visit to London was an unhappy one,"<sup>3</sup> William Allingham recorded in November 1867—who, eighteen months previously, had breakfasted with Rossetti, and Fanny in a white dress, in a small lofty room looking into the garden, and afterwards lain in the grass eating strawberries and watching the peacock,

<sup>1</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, pp. 141-3.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris*, vol. 2, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> *William Allingham: A Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford, p. 166.

until Swinburne joined them and began to recite a parody on Browning. "In art, and still more in life, R. and I have discords not to be resolved. Should we ever have supposed ourselves such friends in early days if we had lived constantly near each other? Has he changed? If I have, I am not aware of it."<sup>1</sup> While W. B. Scott wrote after his death: "For myself, Rossetti had been the last of a succession of men I had loved and tried to make love me; for each of them I could have given all but life, and I was again defeated by destiny. Equal candour and confidence he never had to give, but now his singular manias made ordinary friendly intercourse impossible to him."<sup>2</sup> Even the faithful and affectionate Burne-Jones was disillusioned at last. "Ah! Gabriel was the one to tell things to," he one day exclaimed enthusiastically to Lady Horner. "No, Gabriel, on second thoughts, was not the one to tell things to—and second thoughts are best—but you would think he was, and tell him, and experience the grace of an enduring repentance for it." As for Robert Browning, to whom Rossetti had written with such spontaneous enthusiasm in youth, Rossetti later conceived a secret hatred to him because he imagined that his friend had made an unwarranted attack upon him in *Fifine at the Fair*. One day, when Browning, quite innocent of the situation, suggested that William should accompany him to Cheyne Walk, the devoted brother was hard put to it to make some adequate excuse that would prevent an open rupture.

It was therefore scarcely surprising that Rossetti, already brooding upon Howell's suggested scheme of opening up Lizzie's grave in order to reclaim the manuscript book of unpublished poems that he had buried with her, should be singularly indifferent to Ruskin's visionary schemes. Nor is it difficult to understand the ambiguous utterances that were later to puzzle the young Hall Caine, "who found Rossetti's talk about Ruskin curiously contradictory in tone and feeling, being sometimes tender, generous, highly appreciative and warmly affectionate, and sometimes grudging and even hostile".<sup>3</sup>

Despite their differences in temperament and personality, Ruskin and Rossetti were nevertheless curiously similar in their essential passionate appreciation of art and literature, as in their tragic fate. And secretly linked in prolonged and unaltered suffering, each, at last, was to be hounded across the very borders of sanity by the ineffaceable image of a dead woman.

## 2

But if, during these years, Ruskin was losing some of his old friends, he was also making new ones; and it was in the early 'sixties that he became intimate with those two families who were to play so im-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiographical Notes of W. B. Scott*, ed. W. Minto, vol. 2, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, p. 171.

portant a part in the most tragic and significant episode of his life—the MacDonalds and the Cowper-Temples.

Ruskin was introduced to George MacDonald by Mrs. La Touche on his return from Switzerland in 1863. Mrs. La Touche, who had been staying with her children in her town house in Norfolk Street, had herself only met MacDonald a short time before; and, delighted by the lectures that he was then giving, at once suggested to Ruskin that he should attend them with her. "I am sure you know his works and I think you would like to know him," she told him. "I wonder how you will get on with him—he says he will shock you. He is anxious to make himself out something horrible. . . ."<sup>1</sup> George MacDonald, who at thirty had been turned out of his pulpit in a Sussex town on account of his unorthodoxy, and had never accepted another since, at this time was helping Mrs. La Touche to publish a pamphlet at her own expense; and this served as an excuse for the interchange of many letters. "I want to give out that I have 'renounced the world' and think dinner parties wrong," she wrote in one of these—"but no one would believe me . . ." and added that Mr. Ruskin would send tickets for him and Mrs. MacDonald for his lecture at the Royal Institution. "You had better go early and take good places, and then you can talk to him after his lecture. He is very grumpy still, and needs talking to. Will you write me a line after his lecture and tell me how he got through it? He will tell me he broke down, whether he did or not."<sup>2</sup> So Ruskin met MacDonald for the first time; and, much to Mrs. La Touche's satisfaction, the two men quickly became friends. "I have to thank you for a good deal," she wrote again to MacDonald a few days later, "—most of all for what you could not help—for loving and helping and letting yourself be loved by that poor St. C. Nothing will ever get *me* right, save getting *him* right—for somehow if he were holding on to a straw and I to a plank—I must leave my plank to catch at his straw. Still I don't care what becomes of me as long as anyhow he can be brought to some sort of happiness and life. He knows that very well and is welcome to know it. I don't think anyone on earth can help him or understand him as well as you can. You will talk to him, and let him talk—about his pet Rosie if he pleases. You will like Denmark Hill and the beautiful things there—and you and he will always be fast friends. It is quite my strongest wish."<sup>3</sup>

"I am sure Mr. Ruskin was lovely to you—and he thought you both very lovely to him," she wrote again a few months later, "but I am sad about him—there seems to be still in all his letters a growing tone of misanthropy and unbelief—what can be done for him?"<sup>4</sup>

Ruskin and MacDonald soon became close friends. Each possessed

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.4.1863, unpublished; original held by author's literary executor, Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 15.5.1863, from Harristown, unpublished; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 10.10.1863, from Harristown, unpublished; original with Mr. G. Leon.

that powerful moral ardour, blent of puritanism and mysticism, to be found most frequently in those of Scots blood: each lived in a private world interpenetrated by those influences which arise only outside common life. Like Ruskin, MacDonald (as he wrote in *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*) still retained much of the child beneath the exterior of the man; was one who had never entirely rid himself of his infantile predilections, and once having enjoyed making a mud bridge, was to enjoy all bridges for ever. Like Ruskin, MacDonald had been early affected by the "truth and wonder of Turner", and, during his engagement, had even presented his wife with Ruskin's works: like Ruskin, he had long since diverged from the narrower dogmas of evangelicalism; and, in his younger days, had been charged by the elders of his congregation with the serious accusation of expressing a belief that possibly some provision may be made for the heathen after death, in a sermon preached on the text, "He that doeth my will shall know of the doctrine".

In 1863, MacDonald had just published his first novel, *David Elginbrod*, and Ruskin had found it "full of noble things and with beautiful little sentences". Only, he concluded his letter of appreciation, "it's all nonsense about Everybody turning good. No one ever turns good who isn't."<sup>1</sup>

Befriended, upon the publication of his first poem *Within and Without*—after a long struggle with poverty and tuberculosis—by Lady Byron, who would send her carriage to fetch him and his wife for "tea-dinner", confide to them the true story of her separation from her husband, and who provided him with travelling expenses in order that he might winter in Algiers; George MacDonald, with his passionate belief in a world of the spirit interpenetrating the world we know, and his scarlet cravats that gave him a strange look of "barbaric splendour", had soon surrounded himself with many of the most brilliant intellects of his day. Although both poverty and ill-health prevented him from going much into society, he numbered amongst his friends Mme. Bodichon, Miss Mulock, Mrs. Oliphant, Matthew Arnold, F. D. Maurice (whom he had portrayed in *David Elginbrod*), Charles Kingsley and Henry Crabb Robinson. There was something in the atmosphere of George MacDonald's homes—at Tudor Lodge, at Earls Terrace and at the Retreat, which always captivated men of intelligence and sensibility. R. B. Litchfield wrote to his fiancée, Miss Darwin, in 1871, "I was in an odd state to-night after dinner, feeling a kind of craving for some peaceful atmosphere where I could be happy, something as different as possible from the clubby atmosphere. . . . So I went and saw the MacDonalds—found everybody away except a boy and two girls. The girls (eighteen and thirteen) talked to me till supper time. Sweetness and light (no cant) dwell in that house. . . ." "I always think of you all—your

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 30.6.1863, to George MacDonald; original with Mr. G. Leon.

Head, yourself, and the many big and little ones—as a harmony, a tuneful circle, to which anything might come but discord. I don't see anything like it anywhere else,"<sup>1</sup> Mrs. La Touche wrote in one of her letters to Mrs. MacDonald: and in another: "I can't tell you how often I have thought, with a feeling of grateful love that you would hardly understand, of the many hours of real happiness you have given me—all of you including each child. It is impossible that you, or even your husband with his poet's sympathies, should understand it—for you don't know the kind of life and surroundings that are mine and have always been mine. . . ." <sup>2</sup> While once, when MacDonald had accepted with charming simplicity a handsome gift of money which old Mrs. Ruskin, in generous mood, had sent to enable him to buy toys for the children, Ruskin wrote: "My mother was made so happy by your letter, she says it is so delightful when people are able to take things as they are meant, frankly and sweetly—and that you must be ever so nice a person—which I declared I had told her innumerable times. So now she wants me to write and say how nice she thinks you."<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin undoubtedly shared his mother's view. "What would you say, when it gets a little cooler, . . . to taking Lily with us and having a month or six weeks first on Lago Maggiore and then at Venice and Verona?" he wrote to MacDonald in June 1868. "I want to do some work at Verona, and after I had been about—like a mason—all day it would be nice to come in and see your two happy faces."<sup>4</sup>

As a lecturer, MacDonald asserted the same beguiling influence. "MacDonald's lectures are indeed a success," Octavia Hill wrote to a friend in 1865. "He often nearly brings tears to my eyes by the beauty and truth and suddenness of what he says."<sup>5</sup> C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) evidently thought the same thing, and he was frequently to be seen on Sunday afternoon lying on the grass in the garden, surrounded by the eager small sons and daughters of the house, whom he kept ecstatically amused by the hour with his droll stories and drawings. It was at the 'MacDonalds', indeed, that *Alice in Wonderland*, in its manuscript in small, fine printing with pen and ink sketches by the author, was first read, as an experiment, to the assembled family: and such was the enthusiasm of young Greville, aged six, who announced that there ought to be sixty thousand volumes of it, that "Uncle" Dodgson was persuaded to present his incomparable masterpiece to the world. Greville MacDonald and "Uncle" Dodgson had been great friends ever since, upon meeting the little boy with his sister in Munro's studio, the author had intrigued him by suggesting exchanging his head for a marble one,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated (? 1867); original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of March 14 (no year) from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 1.10.1865; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 25.6.1868; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>5</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, p. 81.

which need not be brushed or combed. "Do you hear *that*, Mary?" the little boy had asked his sister in triumph. "It needn't be combed!"<sup>1</sup>

With his eager appreciation of talent and his irrepressible generosity, Ruskin was soon anxious to help MacDonald in every way he could. Not only did he criticise his work for him: but he did everything in his power to alleviate his financial embarrassments. When Mrs. La Touche told him of some disappointment MacDonald had had in trying to place one of his works, Ruskin wrote off at once: "It is a shame that you can't come to me when any little matter of this sort comes wrong side up. I understand you perfectly—and shall be very grateful for all the love—and *expression* of it you can give me—only I've no love, to speak of, to give in return—but some sympathy, and, I really think, entire understanding; so that you need never shrink from saying you like me if you do—only you know I never believe anybody can possibly like me.

"I hope the enclosed may be in time to be of some use—if you want any more tell me directly, or I'll be angry next time I find it out."<sup>2</sup> And when MacDonald demurred: "Trust in me practically—whether you do theologically or not. You cannot give me a greater privilege than you can by letting me help you."<sup>3</sup> As with all his other friends, Ruskin was very anxious that MacDonald should go to Switzerland, not only for the benefit it might do his health, but even more, for the sake of the astonishing wealth of new and beautiful impressions. "The main thing is, that you are *not* to disturb yourself, as long as I am to the fore," he wrote, when he had prevailed upon his friend to accept his invitation. "The second is, that you must go as straight as you can to *Berne*, not Geneva. Geneva is now one wilderness of accursed gambling and jewellers' shops—mixed up with cafés and stonemasons' yards. At Berne there *is* some Swiss character left—go there straight, thence to Thun, Interlaken and Lauterbrunnen, and don't try to see too much, and if you would like to stay longer than a month, and are happy, I'll send you over some money as my papa used to do to me.—I feel wonderfully like an old man of the world writing to his boy going out for his first happy holidays."<sup>4</sup> When MacDonald once returned a loan, Ruskin affectionately refused to accept it, saying that he had no need of the money. But as MacDonald was adamant, and Ruskin knew that one of the daughters of that very musical family badly desired a new piano, he ordered a fine new grand to be delivered at the house instead.

There is no doubt that Ruskin responded to the charm of the MacDonald family even at those periods when he was suffering most deeply; and after the famous performance of *Beauty and the Beast*

<sup>1</sup> S. D. Collingwood, *Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 6.2.1865; Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, pp. 331-2.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 22.5.1864; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 22.7.1865; original with Mr. G. Leon.



given in 1868 in the lovely secluded garden of the Retreat, to which Octavia Hill had brought all her tenants, it was Ruskin who, with Octavia in a close black bonnet, led the country dance in which all who were able joined in on the lawn.

## 3

About the same time that Ruskin became intimate with the MacDonalds, he also became intimate with their friends, Mr. and Mrs. Cowper (who in 1870 became Mr. and Mrs. Cowper-Temple, and in 1880 Lord and Lady Mount-Temple). It is uncertain whether Ruskin first met the Cowpers at Lord Palmerston's, or whether he was introduced to them by one of Mrs. Cowper's brothers, John Tollemache, with whom he had been associated in some committee. But when he discovered, on their first meeting, that Mrs. Cowper was the beautiful Miss Tollemache whom he had admired so ardently when he was a youth in Rome, admiration soon developed into tender friendship: and in a short time she was calling him St. C. and he was addressing her in his letters as *Isola-Bella*, *Isola*, or *φίλη*, her husband being the complementary *φίλος*. Both Mr. and Mrs. Cowper were people of rare grace of character; and, although a woman of his own age, Mrs. Cowper's affection for him was soon to play much the same role in his life as that of the Countess Alexandra Tolstoy for Tolstoy, or Mme. Strauss for the young Proust.

The Hon. William Cowper, a younger son of Earl Cowper, was a relation of the great poet, the stepson of Lord Palmerston and the grandson of the Lady Melbourne whom Byron described as the cleverest, the most charming woman he knew. Related by the brilliant marriages of his sisters to some of the greatest houses of England (one of them had married Lord Ashley, who later became Lord Shaftesbury, and another Lord Jocelyn, eldest son of the Earl of Roden), William Cowper was one of those rare figures who managed to move with ease and distinction in the great world, without losing his innate integrity or his profound reverence of spirit. In youth an intimate of the Duke of Devonshire, he had been deeply proud to number both Scott and Wordsworth among his friends; and attended the Court in the early weeks of Victoria's reign, when Windsor "swarmed with ministers", or presided over the London Mission, with the same ease and quiet enthusiasm. At first Parliamentary Secretary to his uncle, Lord Melbourne; in 1849 Lay Lord in the Admiralty under Lord Auckland; in 1857 President of the Board of Health, when, in association with Sir John Simon, he had been instrumental in passing the medical bill; later First Commissioner at the Office of Works, when he persuaded William Morris to decorate the Throne Room at St. James' Palace, William Cowper was, all his life, an ardent advocate of such diverse movements as the introduc-

tion of flowers into parks, allotments for labourers, the preservation of commons, the formation of Bands of Mercy, the protection of women and children, the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance, the admission of women into the medical profession, and of universal education.

An ardent Christian Socialist in the days of Hughes and Kingsley, William Cowper had married the gracious and lovely Miss Tollemache in 1848; and by 1864 had become a power both in the social and political worlds. In 1869, after his mother's death, Palmerston made over to him the beautiful Georgian country seat of Broadlands, which had splendid views of Romney Marsh; and here there were held the famous religious conferences of the early 'seventies.

An ardent spiritualist, a famous vegetarian, Mrs. Cowper was nevertheless nothing of a crank: and many have paid tribute to the extraordinary beauty of her character. "I am glad Mr. Cowper . . . is to have the *Beatrice*," Rossetti wrote to his mother in the summer of 1866, "as he, and his wife particularly, are very appreciative people, and it is pleasanter sending a poetic work where it will be seen by cultivated folks than to a cotton spinner or a dealer."<sup>1</sup> "Of course, the house is a splendid place . . ." he wrote to her again from Broadlands, ten years later. "The estate is extremely large, and includes features of every kind of beauty—indeed, the view of the whole from an eminence overlooking it is perfectly surprising. The Isle of Wight is quite visible in the extreme distance on a clear day; having the aspect of a cloud—the Isle—floating above a halo of light—the sea. . . . Mrs. Temple is simply an angel on earth, and, though her husband is less radiantly such, he is no less so in fact. . . . At some time (I trust not remote) both you and Christina must really know the Temples. . . . They would glory in the knowledge of both, and you would simply adore, as all must, the noble beauty of Mrs. Temple's Christ-like character."<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Cowper owned a little house in Curzon Street, where (until, one day when he was dining there, Rossetti cried out that the only way to improve things was to burn everything down, and finally persuaded her to let Morris redecorate it and Burne-Jones design a window for the staircase) the walls were covered with moiré paper decorated with garlands of roses tied with blue bows; the furniture was covered with garlands of roses; and on the mantelpiece the candlesticks were shaped like pelicans and swans. It was in this room that, many a time, when his heart was torn with perplexity and despair, Ruskin would pour out to this "wise and lovely English lady" all the bitter anguish of his fatally unhappy love for Rose La Touche.

<sup>1</sup> D. G. Rossetti, *His Family Letters*, vol. 2, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 333-5.

Ruskin had seen far less of Rose in these recent years than he had formerly anticipated. In 1862, at the height of his despair, he had written to Rawdon Brown: ". . . The only people whom I at all seriously care for, in the British group of islands, and who, in any degree of reciprocity, seriously care for me (there are many who care for me without my caring, and vice versa), wrote three days ago to offer me a little cottage dwelling house, and garden, and field, just beside their own river, and outside their park wall. And the river being clear, and brown, and rocky; the windows within sight of blue hills; the park wall having no broken glass on the top; and the people, husband and wife with two girls and one boy, being all in their various ways good and gracious, I've written to say I'll come when I please; which will, I suppose, be when I want rest and quiet, and get the sense of some kindness near me."<sup>1</sup> For already, by 1862, Rose was very seldom out of Ruskin's mind, and many of his friends already knew of his deep attachment to her. So much so, indeed, that John James had been somewhat disturbed by what he considered to be his son's lack of reticence. For which reason, Ruskin had replied to his complaints with some point: ". . . I can't help being a little amused by your sudden desire for my 'reticence' as to my feelings—recommended by Lady M. Montagu and others. Your great favourite Lord Byron was specially reticent as to his feelings? My favourite Dante—in the same measure. You did not mind my proclaiming to all the world in print the foolish passions of a boy, but you are frightened at my telling my own few friends the difficulties in which the strong life of the man needs their help—or patience. But you need not fear my reserve—the fear is lest I should be too reserved."<sup>2</sup>

There is no evidence as to why the La Touches' invitation came to nothing: but in July Ruskin told Lady Trevelyan that it had fallen through in "various unspeakable—somewhat sorrowful ways".<sup>3</sup> There could not, however, at this time, have been any serious estrangement between Ruskin and Mrs. La Touche, since in February 1863 Ruskin had written to his father to say that he was glad John James approved of the promise he had given her to write nothing of his loss of faith. "It was not one I would have given for money, nor for Turners (which I value much more than money), but it was the only thing I could do for Mrs. La Touche, and she would do all she *could* for me."<sup>4</sup>

Meantime, Rose had been expressing a precocious anxiety as to his spiritual state. "How could one love you, if you were a Pagan?" she

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.5.1862: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 408.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 2.7.1862: *ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 20.7.1862: *ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 20.2.1863: *ibid.*, p. 435.

had asked in one of her charming, spontaneous, childish, beguiling letters. "She was a marvellous little thing when she was younger," Ruskin wrote to C. E. Norton,—“but, which has been one of the things which has troubled me—there came on some over-excitement of the brain, causing occasional loss of consciousness, and now she often seems only half herself, as if partly dreaming. I’ve not seen her for a year, nor shall, probably, for many a year to come. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

It was of this strange illness, apparently partly psychological in origin, that Mrs. La Touche wrote to Mrs. MacDonald on 15 October, 1863: “I am sorry to say my child Rose was taken seriously ill last Monday, and though she is certainly better, there is no chance of her being able to travel next week; it is one of her mysterious brain attacks, less acute, but more persistent, than any former ones. I am afraid she has *thought* herself into this illness, and I attribute it partly to the strong wish and excitement which resulted in her being admitted to her first Communion last Sunday. Although not confirmed, nor willing to be confirmed, she was making herself unhappy at being the only one excluded, on our last Sunday at home, and her desire was granted; I am sure she thought and felt too much about it all. . . . At present she cannot bear a gleam of light or a whisper, nor can she admit *any* of us except one, her brain is so terribly sensitive that all impressions give pain. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The extraordinary nature of Rose’s illness, and the complete devotion and sympathy of her mother at this time, are clearly revealed in a second letter that Mrs. La Touche wrote to George MacDonald five weeks later. “The child is getting quite well by degrees, but she has had had a really dreadful illness, so long and full of strange changes, the only thing that never changed was her vivid and happy faith, in God and in her mother. It was wonderful, and in my long watching I often thought of you for there were what the doctors called ‘psychical phenomena’ that you would have understood better than anyone I know. Being with her was like a Revelation to me. There was a sort of clairvoyance, both of spiritual and earthly things, which was startling. For the first fortnight of her illness she was able to tell beforehand every little thing that would befall her thro’ the day, and always said that she was ‘guided’ in everything. The doctors were perfectly amazed and actually yielded against their judgment in allowing her to follow this ‘guidance’ which never once erred. I do believe It—whatever It was—spared her much suffering and saved her much ‘treatment’ but she became frightfully emaciated and weak at the end of four weeks in bed. Then came the most wonderful change. From a state of weakness so great that she could not sit up in bed, she suddenly after one night’s sleep awoke perfectly strong in body, but with an infant’s mind, an infant’s playfulness, and an

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.3.1863: *ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.10.1863, from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

entire oblivion of all acquired knowledge, and of every person and thing not known to her eleven years ago. By degrees she grew out of this state and it was quite lovely to watch her growth, a beautiful ideal infancy and childhood lived thro' in a fortnight. She told me, in the prescience that was given her before, exactly how all this would be, and named the day and hour in which her strength would return and her mind fail. Thus I was *quite* untroubled, for she had spoken with authority, and had all thro' said, that she would recover perfectly from this illness, body, mind and all, but that the mind would be the last to recover: I was both pitied and laughed at for believing her, but everything came true. She is well now, except for a weakness in her brain which makes it painful for her to have any thought or idea suggested to her in words, unless she asks for it—so she is not able to see people at all, and cannot either read or be read to. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin, on 30 January, 1865, mentions this illness in a letter to Vernon Lushington. “It is very nice of you to care so much for my letter—miserable as it was: indeed I have as affectionate regard for you as it is in me to have for anyone—having had my regards pretty nearly now knocked out of me in various ways; and finding all my pleasure—such as it is—in stones and flowers; and all my pain in such memories or remains of human affection as hang about me still. . . . For instance, I had a little pet of a girl who was a great deal more than a dog or a cat to me—and she went half mad with religion and nearly died—and now she can’t write—or think—consecutively—so that it’s just as if she was dead.”<sup>2</sup>

By 1865, however, Rose seemed to have recovered completely from this mysterious malady: and two fragments from her mother’s letter to Mrs. MacDonald give a very vivid impression of her spontaneous and ardent nature. “Rosie is a wonderfully available little creature in all the saddest realities of life, and yet they never weigh her down or do her a bit of harm. I wish Mr. MacDonald could see her home life—he would put her in a book, with her picturesque silver crested cream-coloured pony, and her huge dog, and her wonderfully independent ways. . . . She is perfectly wild and how she is ever to be made a modern ‘young lady’ of, I can’t imagine. She is out from dawn till dark, and it is utterly useless to put on her any raiment that would not suit a peasant, or to expect from her observance of any of the restraints of civilisation, such as wearing a bonnet under any circumstances whatever—or decently thin boots. . . .”<sup>3</sup> By this time, Rose was already on easy terms with the poor of the neighbourhood, and devoted herself to helping them when and how she could. “She gets on with them better than I do,” Mrs. La Touche admitted

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 19.11.1863; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> W. Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, pp. 105–6.

to Mrs. MacDonald. "I am afraid of them, and afraid of intruding. . . . But Rosie runs in and out of the cabins as a breeze of wind might do. . . . and is mixed up with nearly every village bother. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

By now Rose had also taken to writing verses, and Mrs. La Touche sent Mrs. MacDonald a few scraps of her "very young and crude poetry" to be shown to her husband. "I never show anyone her things, and I am a severe critic to her," she confided. "But a real poet will see that the thoughts are pretty and nice though the lines are worth nothing. She writes a great deal at railroad speed. I take no notice—encouragement would make her go on to headache pitch, repression would make her boil and simmer inwardly. It's a little difficult to manage." <sup>2</sup>

During the summer of 1865, indeed, Rose, by now a "very slender and very fair creature one would readily idealise into a sort of Una", developed almost untrammelled in the beautiful surroundings of her Irish home. "The Wild Rose is very well, but wilder than ever," Mrs. La Touche told Mrs. MacDonald towards the end of September. "I sometimes wonder if she will ever be a civilised being. She is out in the dew like Nebuchadnezzar at break of day—and all day long she is in and out, let the weather be what it may, and not one single thing that girls do does she do—except a *little* music when she pleases. She has the run of all the cottages and cabins about, and gets fed from the labourers' dinners, and is an exception to every rule and custom of society. . . . She got lost on the moors alone, and with her accustomed intrepidity she captured a boy to show her the way, and for miles she walked over the heather with her captive, and told me of her talk with him afterwards, and how *very* kind he was to her, helping her over rough places; and how he told her he wouldn't be out after dark for the world and was surprised that she didn't mind and how, when they came to a house, he said, 'I hope there's no gentry here, to see *you* walking with a dirty lad like me'. . . . And at last she found us and with her hand on her small knight's shoulder said, 'You can't think with what care this boy has taken care of me—and he has so far to go home—and I had only my knife to give him'." <sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile Ruskin was becoming almost desperate to see her. "I can't love anybody," he had written to George MacDonald in February, "except my mouse-pet, in Ireland, who nibbles me to the very sick death with weariness to see her—and sends me bits of mignonette, forsooth—as if they were just as good as her own self, and makes me hate everybody else. . . ." <sup>4</sup> And a few days later: ". . . I wonder Mrs. L. never made you laugh at me a little about Rosie—only she's too good to laugh at me except to my face.—You

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Undated letter, unpublished, from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>4</sup> Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p. 332.

know the child's just a wild fawn—and she likes me well enough—about as much as a nice squirrel would. She sends me orders every now and then—or a bit of mignonette—as I said—and thinks what 'would be nice' for me. She sent me positive orders to Switzerland that I was to come to you the moment I came home—you were the only person, she thought, who could do me any good—and you were 'so nice'. She's the only living thing in the world—since my white dog died—that I care for—and I very nearly died myself, when she got too old to be made a pet of any more—which was infinitely ridiculous. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the year the La Touches came to London, and Ruskin, overjoyed, spent as much time with Rose as her mother would permit. "I want to bring you my little Caucasian pet," he wrote to Professor Sir Richard Owen on 12 December, "who has grown into a terribly Irish-Irish girl—to see you again, and she has been finding bones of old Irish people and old Irish beasts—somewhere in the Wicklow Hills—and I want you to tell her to throw them away, for I don't like her to play with ugly things. . . ."

Early in 1866 he was still having "paradisaical walks with Rosie". "Did you see the gleam of sunshine yesterday afternoon?" he wrote to Burne-Jones. "If you had only seen her in it, bareheaded, between my laurels and my primrose bank."<sup>2</sup>

But such happiness was not to last long. By now Ruskin's deep and passionate love for her could not be hidden; and Mr. and Mrs. La Touche decided that it would be best if they did not see each other again for several years.

Rose herself, when Ruskin asked her to marry him on her seventeenth birthday, bade him ask her again in two years' time; and promised him in any event to give him an answer in 1870 when she would be twenty-one. But although Ruskin felt he had good cause for hope, and counted the days until this should become certainty, Mr. and Mrs. La Touche, who never realised the nature either of Ruskin's feelings for Rose or of Rose's for Ruskin, were already determined that they should forget each other, and that no further meetings should interfere with the possibility of Rose falling in love with some eligible suitor.

## 5

The objections raised by the La Touches at this time to an engagement between Ruskin and their daughter seem to have been of a purely conventional nature, and based upon the great disparity in their ages, and a no less irreconcilable disparity in their religious beliefs. It seems strange that a woman who had known Ruskin intimately for eight years was unable to realise that, despite his present

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 1, p. 299.

intellectual agnosticism, Ruskin always had been, was still, and always would be, a man of profoundly religious temper. But in the habit of that day, Mrs. La Touche, who was a staunch member of the Anglican Church in Ireland, was determined that no daughter of hers should be yoked to an unbeliever. In this she was almost fanatically supported by her husband. Converted and baptised recently by that sonorous Evangelist Spurgeon (who had known Ruskin, and resented the fact that he had told him flatly that, rather than telling people to think about the next world, people had far better be taught to do the best they can in this), Mr. La Touche evidently considered Ruskin to be a lost soul. "I really do twenty times a day bless Mr. Spurgeon (though of course I had far rather it had been the Archbishop of Canterbury or even Cardinal Manning) for rescuing the 'Master' out of the blighting narrowness of a life entirely given to Sport, and enabling him to see the beauty of things he never gave a thought to when he was young,"<sup>1</sup> Mrs. La Touche was to write to a friend years later: but Mr. La Touche evidently practised his religion not only with the fervour of the newly converted but with the provincial-minded fanaticism of the fundamentally obtuse.

But besides this, there entered into the situation motives of a more complex nature. It cannot be doubted that Mrs. La Touche was the most devoted of mothers, even though her devotion endowed her with but little true sympathy and understanding. Nor can it be doubted that, until Ruskin proposed to Rose, she was one of the most devoted of his friends. Indeed, it is all but certain that emotions more powerful than friendship entered into her feelings for him, and that, deceived by his tender and affectionate manner towards her, she had misjudged the nature of their relationship and persuaded herself that Ruskin's attentions to her daughter had been but an expression of his devotion to herself. To find herself, now, suddenly overshadowed by this daughter, was therefore bitterly wounding to her vanity. But, misjudging Rose's feelings as greatly as she misjudged Ruskin's, she hoped that a separation would enable them both to forget each other without any great suffering on either side.

It would seem that at first little or no acrimony entered into this arrangement—perhaps, as Rose was only just seventeen, they did not even take the affair fully seriously, feeling assured that she could certainly not care deeply for Ruskin, and that, even if she imagined that she did, she would soon recover from the illusion. For, after having unbosomed himself in person to the sympathetic Mrs. Cowper, Ruskin had written to her seeking her aid on 19 February, before the La Touches had forbidden all communication between Rose and himself: "You might think it wrong in me to avail myself at all of the reluctant permission of the father and mother to continue in any shadow of our old ways. But there is a quiet trust between Rose and

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of a Noble Woman*, ed. M. F. Young, p. 94.



me which cannot be broken, except by her bidding. I know now certainly that she will not engage herself in any way without telling me about it first;—and also, that in my respect for her (while her mother *will* always treat her as a mere child) and in my understanding of all her thoughts, and sympathy with them (which her father cannot always give)—my regard is precious to her; and she likes to be able to say anything that she has in mind to me—and would not be at all pleased if she were at present obliged to break off intercourse. And I am simply her servant. When she bids me leave her—I shall do so without a word of farther petition. But only *she* can bid me. I must not do it of my own purpose or thought. As far as a child who has never felt love, can imagine what it is, she knows so much of it as that I care only for her happiness—and that she has only to do what is right and best, and due to herself—that nothing else than that could ever help or comfort me.

“Now observe—in any word you speak to the mother—you must remember that she knows perfectly how *I* feel: but there is no confidence between Rosie and her; and she knows nothing of the child’s depth of feeling—and I think could not be brought to understand it, or at least to believe it rightly. Rosie’s just like Cordelia. So you had better not try in any way to speak otherwise of Rosie to her. It would only make things a little more difficult for me, if she thought more of her daughter—and they cannot, at least at present, be brought into any quite true or happy relations.

“Now, with her father, it is nearly the reverse. Rose is infinitely precious to him, and there is great and true sympathy between them;—except about me—for he cannot understand me at all, nor has he any idea of my caring for her otherwise than as a good-natured and—to him—inconvenient friend. But he knows that neither Rose nor I would ever do anything in the least betraying her trust in us; and in now checking our intercourse, I think he is really acting more in fear for me than for her—and dreads, for my sake, that my feelings may become now—what they have been for these seven years.”<sup>1</sup>

At this point Mrs. Cowper must have suggested that one of the greatest difficulties was Mr. La Touche’s passionate devotion to his daughter, and his fear of losing her. “God knows,” Ruskin wrote again a few days later, “that at this instant, if Rosie were to tell me she loved anyone, and could not see them without my help—I would do all for her—bear, if it were necessary, to see them together all day—be their footman and walk behind them—nay, be their servant after they were married—if they needed it. I don’t think her father loves her so well as that—But I never once thought of the difficulty taking that form. I always thought it was mere and pure objection to me—on various—not unreasonable grounds. Why, how properly could he *less* lose her than by giving her to me? He might live with

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 19.2.1866, from Denmark Hill; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

us—or have us live with him—always—he never need be a day away from her.

“For me, it is not a question of pain and of healing. It is a question of two kinds of life—spiritual and material. The love of her is a religion to me—it wastes and parches me like the old enthusiasms of the wild anchorites—I do not know how long I could bear it without dying . . . you speak as if the parents might at some far day consent without utter sorrow—now the mother always told me—*never*, never. Meantime, don’t be vexed for me. I will be quite quiet now, and courageous—for some time, at any rate. You don’t know what hard sorrow I’ve had breaking me down in the three years since I last saw her—I was very close to death in the first year, for the separation took me by surprise. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently, after Mrs. Cowper’s tactful intervention, a few more meetings between Rose and Ruskin were allowed: and Ruskin tried hard to beguile his friend into arranging a house party, with just himself, a few good friends such as the Froudes and Professor Owen (“don’t have Rossetti, please”) and the La Touches, in order that the whole matter could be settled in a more satisfactory manner. But it all came to nothing, and, during the fine weather, Ruskin went abroad. It was now, it seems, that the La Touches prohibited all correspondence between Ruskin and their daughter. “They won’t let her write to me any more now,” Ruskin told Rawdon Brown the following July, “and I suppose the end will be as it should be—that she will be a good girl and do as she is bid, and that I shall settle down to—fifteenth century documents—as you’ve always told me I should.”<sup>2</sup>

Although in the autumn Mrs. La Touche wrote to Mrs. MacDonald upon the birth of her first grandchild (her elder daughter had been married a year or so before): “Old Rose is also very flourishing and more than ever devoted to her big dog Bruno, whom we all call her husband. So far it has not appeared that she will ever have any other husband—but who can tell? . . .”<sup>3</sup> evidently she was still hoping that the dilemma would end by a suitable marriage.

Ruskin, fully aware of this, had written desperately to Mrs. Cowper on 9 August, “Her marriage, if they can bring one about to their mind, will hurt me far more, if it comes after a year or two of silence—than it would if they let me be to her still what I have been—until then, and hear from herself—in her own time and way, whatever she had to warn me of, or to comfort me for, by telling me she was happy.”<sup>4</sup>

To Mrs. Cowper, Mrs. La Touche professed to believe, as she had always professed to Ruskin to believe, that Rose had no particular affection for him; and that her own concern was for him alone. “If they were generous enough to admit that she *might* care a little for

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter (undated) (? 1866); original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 11.6.1866: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Harristown; original held by Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter of 9.8.1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

me," Ruskin continued, "and *that* was what they feared—it would seem to me so much nobler and more right of them than pretending to reason for me unreasonably (which neither of them can do . . .)—and if they do fear for her—they are still foolish to stop the letters—for she is not likely any more than I—to alter her mind in any way during a forced silence—but if they were to let us write frankly, as we used to do, I would play them wholly fair, and treat her (as she herself told me she wished to be still treated) as my child-friend. . . ." And, fearing that Mrs. Cowper, too, believed that Rose had no true affection for him; and perhaps, too, in order to try to persuade himself, no less than her, in his half frantic prescience; he sent her some of Rose's letters to him so that she might form an opinion—one letter from each year, not the "long nicest ones" which were difficult to read, nor the "dearest ones" which he could not let out of their drawer; but simply average, pleasant ones, such as he had been in the habit of receiving regularly. "One thing you will much wonder at—the evidence of teasing I was always giving her. This was the mother's fault. She was always telling me Rose did not care the least for me . . . so that I—too ready to think no one like Rose *could* care for me—never trusted her kindest words—till too late. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

"You are the only person," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper again, "to whose judgment, feeling and world-knowledge I can trust in this matter—who knows Rose. I have one friend—Edward Jones—whose judgment I could trust (if he did not love me too much) but he is not a woman—and not in the world." And bitterly he complained that in her recent letters it seemed to him either that she avoided the subject, or that her meaning was uncertain. Above all, he begged her that she would herself go to Harristown and try to ascertain, no less for herself than for him, the true state of affairs. But Mrs. Cowper, who happened, at that time, to be very busy, had merely replied to him: "She certainly loves you—though it may have been then with a child's love." "Does this mean that you think it is likely now to be more than a child's—or only that it has been or may have been—never anything more?" Ruskin enquired distractedly, and told her how, when he received her note, he had taken it as a rebuke, and sat a little while with his eyes full of tears. By now, indeed, anxiety tormented him to the point of desperation. "You *must* go to Harristown, please (at least if you would, if I were on trial for my life, and you had possession of the only facts that were likely to save me—if you would go then—go now—if it is made in any wise *possible* for you on their side, deep enough for me to trust to, to secure her happiness with me: deep enough to justify me in persevering as I secretly persevere—against the absolute device of both her parents—*You* only have tact, tenderness, and enough of Rosie's confidence to find out this for me. You may not be able—with all—but at least try for

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

me. I can be patient—for any years of years—but—I want to be assured that I ought to be patient. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently, Ruskin still continued to feel that Mrs. Cowper was ambiguous in her replies, for on 11 September he begged, “. . . Do not fear hurting me. The sooner the hurt comes that must, the less it will be. All that you can say of discouragement thoughtfully and sternly—is good for me—but shrinking from the subject, or from what you would feel to be a true friend’s best faith respecting it, hurts me as much—and is not good for me. Tell me simply when it is difficult for you to know what to say. Tell me firmly, when you feel that you ought to say what must give me pain—I do not—surely you must know that I do not—think highly of myself in any wise, but this I will say fearlessly of myself that I am wholly above the hypocrisy of asking for advice—when my mind is made up and when I only want to be encouraged, not advised. And I am above the folly of laying to the account of my friend, the pain she is forced to give—I think as darkly and sadly of all this as you can possibly do for me:—only I dare not cast away the last hope of happiness I have, in mere impatience of trial in the winning it. For mind you—I am too strong hearted to be broken to nothing by the worst that can come—and—when once I get into steady work, with all hope past—shall live in my twilight perhaps more usefully to others than if any good were to come to myself. But if the evil *has* to come, the more I am prepared for it by all advice and previous warning—the better I shall bear it. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Cowper, however, felt that to go to Harristown expressly to aid Ruskin in a suit of which they strongly disapproved would be disloyal to the La Touches; at which Ruskin assured her, were she to go, he would not even wish to know what had passed: that his intention was simply that she should try to clarify the situation, even if it meant acting against his own interests. “Verbally and formally—and in all practical right, she is wholly free,” he assured her. “She has promised *nothing*—I would not accept even as much as she would have given. But in the inner *fact* and force of things—I am certain that for the next two years she is mine:—I am as sure she will not alter her purpose of keeping her heart free, till then—as that the Liffey will not run backwards. Now her father and mother have no conception of this—and I do not like the position at all. All their plans for her will be thwarted for *more* than two years, by circumstances of which they are wholly ignorant—if things stay as they are. . . .

“But I want you to let Rosie talk to you—if she will. It is as much a kindness to the parents as to anyone else. They have not her confidence—cannot have. The father cannot, because she knows he does

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of August 1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 11.9.1866, from Denmark Hill; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

not understand me and cannot judge for *me*—and Rosie is always acting now for me, not for herself. The mother cannot—because we were very dear friends, and the power of the daughter over me justifiably now pains her with a not ignoble jealousy—for the mother is in many ways greater gifted than Rosie—and feels that she ought to have been always principal in power over me, which may perhaps be true—but she can't understand that she can't be to me what Rosie can—she thinks I ought not to need anything else than full friendship, now that I am so old—and then, this is complicated with the real womanly weakness and unavoidable womanly pain of dethroned—or abdicating—beauty. But this makes her bitter and scornful, and separates her from Rosie, and the child is *alone*. . . .

“My own view—disturbed as it is by wild hope and wilder pain—is yet sternly this—that if Rosie loves me wisely, things are all right; the clandestine colour, or discolour—cannot be helped, for a time—for her health would not allow her parents to act with decision—even if they knew all (if she were quite well and strong I should not allow things to be as they are for an instant). But if she is only acting in pity for me—and childish tenderness—things are all wrong: and very cruelly ordered for me and dangerously for herself. . . .”

Also, if she could discover “the degree of absolute and final resistance which her father would offer”, this, Ruskin thought, she honourably and kindly might: but the most important thing was that Rosie should be able to speak to her freely, from her heart.<sup>1</sup>

In the end, Mrs. Cowper did not go to Harristown, though it would seem that she received some evidence in the next few days which led her to believe that Rosie's feelings for Ruskin were far more serious than she had believed. For a fortnight later Ruskin wrote to her yet again: “Your note has made me very happy. I felt always convinced that you did not know how much ground for hope I had—but you seemed to think it so fearfully impossible that she *could* care for me that I couldn't tell you. Not that I can believe it a bit myself, only it *was* terrible to find *you* so incredulous too. I don't mean that I distrust the child's word or faith. I am as sure of her as of the standing of the Langfrae crest—for what she has promised—only I don't know if it is pity or love that stays her—and it makes all the difference.

“ . . . Jacob was not so astonishing a person neither. Only give me *his* chance!—let Mr. La Touche take me for a herdsman at Harristown—give me a shed to sleep in—and the husks that the swine did eat for food—and see if I should tire! But, as it is—I am so sick already for the sight of her that, if it were not that it would plague herself, I would go to Ireland now, and lie down at their gate—and let them do what they chose with me. . . . How could they help themselves, if I chose to do it. . . . I would make terms for an hour's look and no talk. I would do it instantly if it were not for teasing

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.9.1866, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

her. . . . It's just eight hundred and twenty-eight days—twenty-four hours long each—to her twenty-first birthday. And it's four hundred and fifty-eight to the day when she told me I might 'ask the same'. And to think how long one hour is! when one's waiting for some things. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In his frenzy of pain, he had not yet given up trying to persuade his friend to go to Harristown, for the following days he wrote again: "I know the La Touches don't know what they are doing—or they would not do it—and I can't make them understand—you may, a little. They could no more do this to me that they are now determined on, if they knew and felt the meaning of it, than they could fasten me to a pillar and saw me in sunder. They would not dare to do that—would neither have courage nor cruelty enough to give me ten minutes' sharp pain and end me;—yet they think nothing of poisoning my life and thoughts day by day and killing me with an *infinite* pain. They took the child away from me—practically—four years ago—and since that day of April, 1862, I have never had one happy hour—all my work has been wrecked—all my usefulness taken from me. I am not given, indeed, to think much of that—and yet I know there are many who love me—whom I might have loved and helped—whom I cannot love because of this—though I could have loved dearly through her;—there are hundreds—literally hundreds, whom I know—among my workpeople alone—who are all more or less paralysed and broken because I am, I, who, weak as I might be—was once their leader—and now have no strength or heart to lead them. And there are others—(surely many others?) who *were* more or less helped by my work—and would have been, by its maturer energy—far more—who are now discouraged by every word I say—and all through this. You may tell me it ought not to be so—but it *is* so—and will be. I don't say I ought not to be braver—But I am not. There is a little good in me—which—helped, might have been great good. No man of honest or simpler purpose lives—no man of kinder heart (if you will carefully distinguish kindness from affection, for I never loved many—and now—but this child, none), and yet I am denying myself many things that I might help those whom I have never seen. And this might all have been carried up and on into bright life—if these two people—one 'religious'—the other saying she loves me, had but trusted—the one his God—and the other, the truth of her daughter's heart and mine, so far as to deal with mere justice by us both. It is not as if they had been asked to risk their daughter's happiness. It was not I who would have asked for help at that cost. If it would indeed not be well for her to come to me, I would live on the other side of the world rather than she should. No man could be more easily convinced of this—if this be so:—only it must be by my own watching—and by the word of *her* own lips.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 28.9.1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

They ran *no* risk in letting us be as we were—no risk whatever in any wise. My pain might have been—in one way, a little greater—but it would have been acquiesced in—sustained resignedly—without indignation—with full acknowledgement of God's hand in it—with conclusive putting it in his hand again—and trust to him of all my tears—while now—it is with sense of horror—and mischance—and doubtful, helpless striving to the light—and writhing—as a worm 'cloven in vain'—above all—with scorn of the 'religion' which is so merciless to me—and through that, the doubt of all other. And they are doing the worst for themselves. Had they left us free—nay—if they will yet leave us free now—and let Rosie write to me in her old way—no error at all is possible for either of us—that which is best in the matter for her, and for them, therefore—must, as far as human truth can reach it, be hers and theirs—if they persist—indeed I may yet conquer them, but would farther loss of my own best life and irrevocable shadow between them and me—or they *may* conquer me and kill me—and I doubt if it will be well for them, even so—for many besides myself, it will be ill—if anything *is* ill. . . . They may say the mere contingency of my winning her is not to be endured by them—but why this? If they either of them believe one word of the one calumny abroad against me—they ought never to have let me *speak* to their child. If they do not—what else is there so dreadful in me?—I am old (older now, by ten years, for what they have done to me)—but many a youth is indeed older yet, and contingently nearer the dominion of the shadow of death. No human creature can say I have injured them. Thousands can say I have aided them. I am pure hearted—many—both young and old—love me. The young most—and I love their daughter and *have* loved her—as few ever love young or old. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently, at this point, in her charity and affection for him, Mrs. Cowper, unable to contrive to go to Harristown, wrote to Mrs. La Touche instead, and later sent Ruskin a note inviting him to come and see her, and telling him that, despite all she could say, Rose's mother still insisted that it “could never be”. “Why am I so utterly inferior to—such a poor clergyman as they let Emily once give hope to?” Ruskin cried out bitterly in reply. “Her brother's tutor—as to make it their resolve to see me die rather than let me also have so much as one ray of hope?”<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Rose had herself written to Mrs. Cowper: and, although her state of mind and emotion is clearly ambiguous, it is equally clear that, despite her parents, she definitely desired Ruskin still to have some cause for hope. “. . . Mama has been talking to me about St. C. and you and myself, and I have been thinking over it (though it does not require much thinking) and wonder if I have

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 29.9.1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 18.10.1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

said anything that would make St. C. hope too much, or do him harm.

"Will you let me say it plainly to you as though I was your daughter—and I will promise you to tell it all, the same, to my mother, that you may not think my confidence is wrongly placed.

"I cannot say more than I have said to St. C.—'that in three years (if we are both alive, and I believe we will be), God helping me I will give him his answer'.

"I cannot tell him what that will be—I would not if I could. I *could* tell him that I care for him very much now, with my child heart—or woman heart—whichever some might call it—but that I must not only think of that—and that *whatever* the end is I shall always care for him—God only knows how well—

"But that is just why I would not hurt him. I will act fairly and rightly by him—First truly to God and to Right, and then to him.

"And I will think over everything in these three years. But he need not want to know so often how I feel towards him, for it is not likely I shall stop caring for him—I mean, it is not possible—and nothing will make me change and give him his answer sooner."<sup>1</sup>

And, as was her habit, Rose chose this time for sending Ruskin some verses and an elevating text. But Ruskin, even though he could not reject the thought that in some strange way she was divinely appointed to teach and save him, was not now to be pacified by such pretty, futile attentions. "Look here," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper—"if I were lying wounded—bleeding slowly to death—and Rosie were withheld by her father from coming to bind the wound—she would not then be content to bid me 'not stir—lest I should break the charm'. Now this is literally so,—in a far deeper sense. Every hour of the pain takes some life out of my soul. It may, if I conquer it (even if she *never* can help me), give me a certain calmness of bitter strength which I had not before—but otherwise it is simply making my heart cold and my hair grey, at a time, at the time, in all my life, when I most needed the help of anyone who loved me. . . . One word of *common sense*, as to the kind of life which she believes we might live together—counting firstly the differences of age, circumstance, temper and the like, and the way in which, supposing herself to love me, she could bear with the difference in our faiths—one word, I say of simple forethought and advice—whether such advice related to the contingency of her accepting or refusing me, would be worth a thousand verses to me, just now. I know you cannot get this—it is not in her power—and would not consist with her present ideas of her duty, to say anything of the kind—and for such thought and tenderness as she expresses—do not think me ungrateful—but forgive me—it is just because I have such perfect confidence in her truth and love that I don't much care for these pretty sayings. If I could write to her, I

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 18.10.1866; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.



should say—My pettie, do you think after—through six years of my unbelieving, petulant, querulous love for you, you have never failed for a moment in your steady tenderness of care for me, that I doubt you now, when you know how intense the love was, and is (unbelieving and petulant because so great). Do you think I cannot trust you for three years—when I have tried you since you were a child? I know perfectly well that you think of me—pray for me—and would, and will—save me from all evil in your power—You need not send me any words to tell me this. But what I *do* distrust in you, is knowledge of yourself—of me—of the world—and one word showing that you knew the real pain I was suffering, and that you had any clear conception of what my life was likely to be in *either* alternative (your acceptance or refusal of me)—would give me more peace than a thousand texts. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Ruskin was to know no moment of peace for many months. For close upon this pain of being severed from her utterly, came the news that Rose now had another lover. Nothing whatsoever is known of this attachment, save that in the middle of the following summer Rose sent him a rose; and this he took as a sign that this lover had been dismissed. “Since Rosie sent me that last Rose, after refusing her other lover,” he wrote to his mother on 24 July, 1867, “I have felt so sure of her that everything else begins to be at peace with me.” And that September, when he went for a change to Abbeville, he recorded in his diary: “I went to my work for the first time this many and many a day singing a little to myself.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of October 1866; original held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 24.7.1867: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 531.

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## Chapter V

1. *Letters and lectures: "Sesame and Lilies": "Ethics of the Dust": "A Crown of Wild Olive": "Time and Tide": the second Reform Bill: Thomas Dixon.* 2. *Friendship with Carlyle: the Eyre Defence Committee: Ruskin's speech: quarrel between Ruskin and Carlyle: reconciliation: the affection of later years.* 3. *Deaths of Mrs. Carlyle and Lady Trevelyan: holidays abroad: growing disillusion.*

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ALTHOUGH, from the time of his father's death until the end of his life, Ruskin was to embark upon every form of generosity, so that, when he died, he had so disencumbered himself of his possessions that he left little more than his house and its contents, and about £10,000, he nevertheless found himself practically isolated by the amenities of an ample fortune; and for the future his way lay less among impecunious young artists than amongst those already comfortably established in the world. This was as limiting as it was inevitable. And though he was always to support a number of young artists who worked for him upon the projects with which he was temporarily engaged, he was never to live with them on intimate terms, as he had formerly with Millais and Rossetti.

However, the possession of a large private fortune made no difference to Ruskin's passion for work, or to the range of his interests; while it enabled him to acquire specimens for his various collections far more freely than he had ever been able to do before. And even the painful vicissitudes of his emotional life could not prevent him from following the subtly interconnected threads of his diverse interests.

No sooner was the parental censorship removed than Ruskin became an inveterate writer to the newspaper upon every subject that touched his artistic and sociological interests. He wrote letters upon the law of Supply and Demand: upon the subject of work and wages: upon the servant question: upon foreign policy and upon the glacial theory in geology. He contributed to the *Art Journal*, early in 1865, the series of papers upon the laws of art which were later collected as *The Cestus of Aglaia*. And he went up and down the country lecturing in provincial cities upon every subject that lay nearest to his heart. As a lecturer, indeed, he had by now won considerable renown. "Ruskin's lecture was beyond all measure beautiful," wrote Octavia Hill, who heard him at this time, to a friend. "It was like one grand prayer, song preaching from end to end. It was as if he would plead with us to work with our Father in mighty

mercy to her children."<sup>1</sup> And at Cambridge, on another occasion, when he delivered the Rede Lecture: "I never heard anything like the prolonged and wondrous music of his description of the view from the garden of a villa. I had felt painfully how Ruskin knew that he had little sympathy from his audience, but when he came to one part, the whole body of people listened in awe. I only knew it by the applause that burst and rolled out. He had carried the whole audience with him, and they felt that there was someone present greater than themselves."<sup>2</sup> Thus it was that, for many years to come, most of his works were to take the form of collected letters, articles, or lectures, which had often been specially, or largely, re-written for publication.

Between 1864 and 1866 he published three volumes: *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Ethics of the Dust*, and *The Crown of Wild Olive*: all reprints of lectures in his most discursive manner, and embodying many of his continually expanding sociological ideas. The most important ideas which they contain will therefore be left for consideration in a later study of the complete Ruskinian social philosophy.

*Sesame and Lilies*, which was published in June 1865, which was soon to become the most widely read of all Ruskin's works, and which, after its author's death, was to have the distinction of being translated into French, with the devoted collaboration of Mary Nordlinger, by the young Proust, consists chiefly of two lectures, one delivered at the Rusholme Town Hall, Manchester, in aid of a fund for a Public Library; and the second at the City Hall in aid of a fund for more schools. Although in the new edition of 1871, when his Dublin lecture, *The Mystery of Life and its Arts*, was incorporated, the volume was dedicated to Mrs. Cowper-Temple in her esoteric name of φιλη, and the second part was actually written for her, Ruskin had intentionally written the first lecture, and intended the whole book, for Rose La Touche. For who but her, too, could he have written in *Lilies*: "There is *one* dangerous science for women—one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch—that of theology. Strange, and miserably strange, that while they are modest enough to doubt their powers, and pause at the threshold of sciences where every step is demonstrable and sure, they will plunge headlong and without one thought of incompetency, into that science in which the greatest men have tumbled and the wisest erred."<sup>3</sup>

*Sesame and Lilies*, however, with its fine apology for literature—the one simply accessible medium for the communion with great minds—occasioned, on its first appearance, a good deal of envenomed criticism. Although Coventry Patmore called it a pearly book, and Lady Waterford, after reading it, was sent melancholy to bed at the

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, p. 127.

thought of all being wrong and out of joint with the times, others adopted in their critiques a more fashionable levity. The prosaic and successful Trollope, who admitted that the words were arranged with surpassing beauty, found its arguments hardly to be borne; the *Saturday Review* considered that a more apposite title for the farrago would have been *Thistles and Dead Sea Apples*, or *Fools' Paradises and Wise Men's Purgatories*. Nevertheless, partly because it was the first work that Ruskin had published at so low a price as 3s. 6d., and partly because its contents, although discursive, seemed so eminently suitable for the edification of young girls, it turned Ruskin, from being a writer known chiefly to the *cognoscenti*, into a writer whose name was to become a household word. Before many years had passed, *Sesame and Lilies* became one of the classic presents to be offered to the female young: and from *de luxe* editions beautifully bound and printed on vellum and laid ostentatiously upon drawing-room tables covered with damask cloths edged with ball fringes, to paper-covered editions available for a few pence and perused in the humblest cottages, the book found a place in nearly every home and schoolroom.

Elevated in conception, passionately eloquent in execution, *Sesame and Lilies* contained, in Ruskin's own words, "the best expression I have yet been able to put in words of what, so far as is within my power, I mean henceforward both to do myself, and to plead with all over whom I have any influence to do according to their means."<sup>1</sup>

It was in his preface to the later edition of 1871, too, that he confessed his affinity to the Guinicelli, some of whose poems had been translated by Rossetti in his *Early Italian Poets*, and who also had likened his love to the lily and the rose: to Dean Swift, of whom he wrote to his mother from Baveno in 1869, that putting aside his delight in dirt, which was a mere disease, he was very like himself in most things, and in his opinions, exactly the same: and to Marmontel, with whom he had sympathy in his constant natural temper, and thoughts of things and of people. Elsewhere, both to his mother and to Mrs. Cowper-Temple, he had likened himself to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in many things.

Through Rousseau, Marmontel and Ruskin came those influences that were to colour so radiantly the Combray scenes of *Remembrance of Things Past*. For although Proust once declared that he considered *Sesame and Lilies* the worst of all Ruskin's books, and later, like Marcel with Bergotte, believed that he had emancipated himself completely from Ruskin's influence, there was also an affinity between Ruskin and Proust that went deeper than any conscious thought. Indeed, so deeply was the young Proust to assimilate into his own original and powerful understanding those ultimate truths which inform much of Ruskin's theory of art, that in later years, even while he believed

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

that the whole magic and mysterious link was broken, he was expressing his profoundest views of literature in the reflected light of much that Ruskin had previously taught him.

It was in the form of lectures, too, but impromptu lectures, with questions and answers, intimately delivered to the lively and responsive young pupils of Winnington School, that Ruskin wrote the idiosyncratic and unpopular work entitled *The Ethics of the Dust*, which was published the following Christmas. "It is all about crystallography," Carlyle, who had received a complimentary copy, wrote to a friend, "and seems to be, or is, geologically well-informed and correct; but it twists symbolically in the strangest way all its geology into morality, theology, Egyptian mythology, with fiery cuts at political economy: pretending not to know whether the forces and destinies and behaviour of crystals are not very like those of a man. Wonderful to behold. The book is full of admirable talent, with such a faculty of expression in it, or of picturing out what is meant, as beats all living rivals."<sup>1</sup>

To the author himself, Carlyle was even more enthusiastic. "Not for a long while have I read anything tenth-part so radiant with talent, ingenuity, lambent fire (shut and other lightnings) of all commendable kinds! Never was such a lecture on crystallography before had there been nothing else in it, and there are all manner of things. In power of *expression*, I pronounce it to be supreme; never did anybody who had *such* things to explain, explain them better. And the bits of Egyptian Mythology . . . apart from their *elucidative* quality, which is exquisite, have in them a poetry that might fill any Tennyson with despair. You are very dramatic, too; nothing wanting in the stage-directions, in the pretty little indications—a very pretty stage and *dramatis personae* altogether."<sup>2</sup>

But *The Ethics of the Dust*, despite Carlyle's appreciation, was as signal a failure as had been *Unto this Last* and *Munera Pulveris* before it, without even occasioning a similar uproar. The public ignored it: the publishers begged Ruskin to write no more in dialogue: and those who were best pleased were the pupils of Winnington School.

*The Crown of Wild Olive*, published in May 1866, a work written in the same mood as *Sesame and Lilies*, and also belonging to the main body of Ruskin's sociological works, consists of three lectures delivered in 1864 and 1865: *On Traffic*, given at Bradford, in connection with the design for a new Exchange; *On Work*, delivered to the Working Men's Institute near Denmark Hill; and *On War*, delivered to the cadets of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. With great ingenuity, Ruskin uses the opportunities presented to him to convey in trenchant and persuasive manner some of his fundamental sociological ideas. These ideas he continued to pursue, with intermittent

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: His Life in London*, vol. 2, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, pp. lxxiii–lxxiv.

vigour, in *Time and Tide*, a series of letters addressed to Thomas Dixon, published in February, March, April and May, 1867, in the *Scotsman*, the *Leeds Mercury*, the *Manchester Daily Examiner and Times* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and issued in volume form a few months later.

*Time and Tide* was Ruskin's characteristic contribution to the political situation of the day—the fierce controversy which had suddenly blazed up over the Second Reform Bill proposed by the Bright-Gladstone coalition, which intended a moderate degree of working class enfranchisement by reducing the occupation franchise in the counties from £50 to £14, and the boroughs from £10 to £4.

During the last twenty years, there had been a great alteration in political sentiment. The fierce class hatred provoked by Chartism had gradually died away, and by allying itself to the rich, middle class Radical party, the working class movement had considerably extended its power. Nevertheless, moderate as were the reforms suggested by the new bill, they were enough to split the Whig party which had produced it, the more conservative of which now joined the Tories in a fierce campaign to quash the new measures. Robert Lowe and the Cave of Adullam immediately joined forces with Disraeli, and there began a vitriolic newspaper campaign against extending the franchise to a section of the community obviously inferior to the ruling classes both in moral and intellectual spheres. In opposition, the new trades unions and the Radicals staged huge demonstrations at Birmingham and Manchester and other manufacturing cities, in which Bright, amidst uproarious enthusiasm, eloquently denounced an effete and rapacious aristocracy. Nevertheless, the Second Reform Bill was once more defeated, and the Russell-Bright-Gladstone Government was forced to resign. But though Derby and Disraeli immediately took office without dissolution, the country remained in a state of violent unrest. There were incendiary speeches in provincial towns; there were frequent organised demonstrations; Reform leagues and Reform unions sprang up on all sides, and when refused admission to Hyde Park, an outraged mob tore up the railings. The tension became so acute that the Queen became anxious, and urged her Prime Minister not to oppose further measures demanded by so large a section of her people. Whereupon Disraeli and Derby, aided by the more Radical section of the Whig-Liberals, with suave and magnificent opportunism, passed through the House measures considerably more extensive than those that had previously been rejected: an occurrence not unusual in English politics. As early as February 1842, Charles Greville had noted: "The Tories only can carry liberal measures. The Whigs work, prepare, but cannot accomplish them; the Tories directly or indirectly thwart, discourage and oppose them till public opinion compels them to submit, and they

are obliged to take them up, and to do that which they can do, but the Whigs cannot do.”<sup>1</sup>

*Punch* commemorated the occasion with a cartoon depicting the Prime Minister, Lord Derby, in bonnet and petticoats, making off with the infant Bill, while its mother, Lord John Russell, surveyed the empty pram and lamented: “Hi! Help! Ple-aece! She’s takin’ away me child.”

Such an opportunity to air his own social philosophy could not be wasted; and, wholly agreeing, as he did, with neither party, Ruskin used it for the further elaboration of his own continually expanding ideas. Thus *Time and Tide by Weare and Tyne. Twenty-Five Letters to a Working Man of Sunderland on the Laws of Work*, was both a supplement to *Munera Pulveris* and the forerunner of *Fors Clavigera*, and can be considered only in relation to the whole of his social philosophy.

Thomas Dixon, a cork cutter by trade, to whom these letters were addressed, was a very curious and remarkable character. Stoic, asthmatic, industrious and benevolent, although almost entirely self-educated, he had a keen and cultivated appreciation of art and letters. Both a practical man and an idealist, he befriended many young working people who aspired to something beyond the making of money, and interested himself actively as far as lay in his power in all measures likely to promote the general well-being and the cultural improvement of his class: and it was partly through his efforts that there were eventually established in Sunderland both a Government School of Design and a free library. Good-natured, warm-hearted and un-selfconscious, he was not only prone to correspond with eminent men unknown to him, but had even cultivated the habit of sending them presents of books. He had already written to Ruskin to ask for copies of all his politico-economical writings: and in honour of Carlyle’s seventieth birthday, in 1863, he had combined with some friends to send the venerable thunderer a copy of Bewick’s *Birds*. These kindly attentions were not always received with an equal good feeling; and on 29 March, 1866, Browning wrote petulantly to William Rossetti, “I get from time to time letters from Thomas Dixon . . . who chooses to write them and embarrass me: he sends books as ‘presents’—thinking there is a lack of that commodity in London, apparently. And I don’t like to hurt his feelings because, from sundry peculiar bits of spelling and other epistolatory infelicities in a mild way, I suppose him to need indulgence. . . .”<sup>2</sup> However, this “highly laudable, but sometimes inconvenient man”<sup>3</sup> (as William Rossetti called him) enjoyed the friendship and esteem of several distinguished men. “I never knew of any one individual in any walk

<sup>1</sup> *Greville Memoirs*, ed. H. Rouse (11.2.1842), vol. v, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, pp. 179-80.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

of life—even a much higher one than his—who was so entirely devoted to promoting intellectual good among those within his reach.”<sup>1</sup> D. G. Rossetti wrote of him; while Max Muller declared to a friend, after his death: “You know that Thomas Dixon was not a learned man, but I can assure you that his letters, in spite of occasional mistakes in spelling, showed a clearer insight into the true objects of all my writings and conveyed to me more useful criticism than many a review in the best weekly, monthly, or quarterly journals.”<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Dixon, indeed, enjoys the distinction of having been the first Englishman to appreciate Whitman, and was even instrumental in the publication of the first English edition: since it was he who first discovered *Leaves of Grass* among the wares of an itinerant bookseller who had served in the American Civil War contemporaneously with the poet; and reported the wonderful discovery to William Bell Scott, who in turn sent a copy to William Rossetti, its official English sponsor.

Thus, when he now wrote to Ruskin to elicit his opinion upon the new reforms, Ruskin was pleased and replied in a series of informal letters which he permitted Dixon to publish where he pleased.

## 2

Since the fixation of his energies upon the subject of political economy, and the death of his father, Ruskin had drawn steadily nearer to Carlyle. “No one managed Carlyle so well as Ruskin,” Mrs. Carlyle used to say: “it was quite beautiful to see him. Carlyle would say outrageous things, running counter to all Ruskin valued and cared for. Ruskin would treat Mr. Carlyle like a naughty child, lay his arms round him, and say, ‘Now this is too bad’.”<sup>3</sup> When he was in London, Ruskin would visit Carlyle in Chelsea regularly: while sometimes even Carlyle would be persuaded to ride out to Denmark Hill to see the Turners, to pore over Ruskin’s ‘superb mineralogical collection’ and receive a free discourse upon the same,” and talk to the indomitable Mrs. Ruskin and the pleasant Joan Agnew, with whom he shared many Scottish associations.

It was chiefly on account of his friendship with Carlyle that Ruskin, to many people’s immense surprise, became, in the winter of 1865, a prominent member of the Eyre Defence Committee: and the views which prompted him to do so, eloquent as he was in their expression, seem to have been generally misunderstood.

In 1865, chiefly owing to a state of almost incredible poverty and of

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *D. G. Rossetti: His Family Letters*, vol. ii, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. lxxix.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, p. xlvii.



widespread unemployment, the recently emancipated Negro population of Jamaica was in a state of dangerous excitement, deliberately worked up by the dissemination of the most vitriolic and calumnious anti-English propaganda. On 11 October, there was an open and savage rebellion; and the most bestial elements of the black population not only stormed and set fire to the Court House at Morant Bay, but murdered a dozen or so of the white colonists in the most brutal and shocking manner. In order to restore order and prevent further arson and murder, the Governor, Eyre, not only proclaimed martial law and indicted nearly a hundred natives for high treason, but hanged George William Gordon, the chief advocate of the rights of the Negroes, who was considered by his superstitious following to be a wizard, and immune to bullets. This action had already quietened the more turbulent elements, when further savage reprisals were adopted, and the army and a wild mountain tribe were engaged in quelling the rebels of the plains with fire and sword. Later, Governor Eyre himself admitted that he was unaware of all that had happened during the fighting, though he knew that at least a thousand native huts had been burnt.

When news of all this reached England, it caused the utmost consternation: and having first been praised for the energy and the presence of mind with which he had suppressed the uprising, he was presently recalled in disgrace to give account of his actions.

Meanwhile, the Society for the Abolition of Slavery started an attack upon him in which its indignation considerably exceeded its discretion. It was suggested that Eyre should be publicly caged and displayed like an animal in the zoo for the public to spit upon; and a committee, which included John Stuart Mill, Spencer and Huxley, was formed to bring him to trial on a charge of murder.

Meantime, an opposition for his defence was formed by Tennyson, Kingsley and Dickens, warmly supported by Carlyle and Ruskin, who argued that the Governor had merely done his duty; and even if some innocent people had suffered, in saving the whole of the white population from the most brutal deaths, the end surely justified the means. Ruskin, as usual, was prodigal of eloquence, time and money. "It is a curious thing to me," he wrote in *Time and Tide*, "to see Mr. J. S. Mill foaming at the mouth, and really afflicted conscientiously, because he supposes one man to have been unjustly hanged, while by his own failure (I mean *wilful* failure) in stating to the public one of the first elementary truths of the science he professes, he is aiding and abetting the commission of the cruellest possible form of murder on many thousands of persons yearly, for the sake of simply putting money into the pockets of the landlords. . . ."<sup>1</sup> "I would ask him as one of the leading members of the Jamaica Committee, which is the greater crime, boldly to sign a warrant for the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 437.

death of one man, known to be an agitator, in the immediate outbreak of such agitation, or, by equivocation in a scientific work, to sign warrants for the death of thousands of men in slow misery, for *fear* of an agitation which has not begun; and, if begun, would be carried on by debate, not by the sword."<sup>1</sup>

"The Eyre Committee," Carlyle wrote to a friend on 15 September, 1866, "is going on better, indeed is now getting fairly on its feet. Ruskin's speech—now don't frown upon it, but read it again till you understand it—is a right gallant thrust, I can assure you. While all the world stands tremulous, shilly-shallying from the gutter, impetuous Ruskin plunges his rapier up to the very hilt in the abominable belly of the vast block-headism, and leaves it staring very considerably."<sup>2</sup>

Impetuous Ruskin, indeed, in this speech, made his own position in the matter fully clear, and maintained that he had joined the Committee in the hope of obtaining justice, not only for black men, or white, but for men of every race and colour. No man more than he detested all cruelty and injustice, and he would sternly reprobate the crime which dragged a black family from their home to dig fields, as he would more sternly reprobate the crime which turned a white family from their home in order that a new railroad might be made over their hearth. But Eyre's accusers, he maintained, evidently confused the office of a Governor with that of a judge. The duty of a judge was merely to enforce law: of a Governor, to act in emergency, if necessary, above the law: and Eyre had no alternative but to take upon himself the duties of the higher office. Mr. Mill and his party adopted the view that to hang a man on suspicion amounted to murder. If this were so he presumed that to shoot a man on suspicion would be no less murder. Now in the course of the past year, a drunken workman staggered, late at night, inside the garden gate of a gentleman living in London. The gentleman looked out of his window, saw the drunken man in his garden, and then and there, on suspicion, shot him dead. The jury did not even bring him in guilty of manslaughter. That being the present state of the home law respecting human life, Mr. Mill's beautifully logical position might be expressed in these terms: "For the protection of your own person, and of a few feet of your own property, it is lawful for you to take life, on so much suspicion as may arise from a shadow cast on the wrong side of your wall. But for the safety, not of your own poor person, but of sixteen thousand men, women and children, confiding in your protection and entrusted to it: and for the guardianship, not of your own stairs and plate-chest, but of a province involving in its safety that of all English possessions in the West Indies—for these minor ends it is not lawful for you to take a single life on suspicion,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 444-5.

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. 2, p. 330.

though the suspicion rest, not on a shadow on the wall, but on the experience of the character and conduct of the accused during many previous years.

"The one question at issue was whether, under circumstances of instant public danger, Mr. Eyre did, or did not, to the best of his power and ability, do what he conceived to be his duty: and to this question all true Englishmen could make but one answer. The threat of prosecution, in fact, was but the cry of a nation blinded by its avarice to all true valour and virtue, and haunted, therefore, by phantoms of both; it was the suicidal act of a people which, for the sake of filling its pockets, would pour mortal venom into all its air and all its streams; would shorten the lives of its labourers by thirty years a life, that it might get its needle-packets twopence each cheaper; would communicate its liberty to foreign nations by forcing them to buy poison at the cannon's mouth, and prove its chivalry to them by shrinking in panic from the side of a people being slaughtered, though a people who had given them their daughter for their future Queen; and then would howl in the frantic collapse of their decayed consciences, that they might be permitted righteously to reward with ruin the man who had dared to strike down one seditious leader, and rescue the lives of a population. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In his eloquent pleading for Governor Eyre, indeed, is manifest his whole attitude to slavery, which had so much puzzled his American friends such as C. E. Norton during the American Civil War. "I understand something more by 'slavery' than either Mr. J. S. Mill or Mr. Hughes," he had written to the *Daily Telegraph* on 20 December, 1865; "and believe that white emancipation not only ought to precede, but must by law of all fate precede, black emancipation."<sup>2</sup> In actual fact, despite his intense and innate idealism, Ruskin was equally essentially a practical man, and could pierce the weaknesses of theoretical ideas of progress with a mind undeluded by formal and inhibiting logical processes which fail to consider the part in relation to the whole.

But it would seem that eventually Ruskin wearied of this affair, which dragged on pertinaciously month after month: and on 26 February, 1867, William Rossetti noted in his diary: "Howell says that Carlyle got Ruskin to join the Eyre Defence Fund by urging him to second Carlyle in that body, and that Ruskin now considers himself somewhat left in the lurch by Carlyle's absence in Italy, while Ruskin, who would willingly have kept out of the whole affair, remains here to bear the brunt."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, despite Ruskin's deep devotion to Carlyle, and Carlyle's enthusiastic acceptance of the younger man as his most

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, pp. 553-4.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 551.

<sup>3</sup> *Rossetti Papers*, 1862-70, p. 225.

devoted disciple, in 1866 they had a bitter quarrel, and upon the most slender of grounds.

In his unrevised letters to Thomas Dixon, Ruskin had written in his freest and boldest manner, bringing in personalities as easily as he put forth ideas. He had upset William Rossetti, by telling the Sunderland cork cutter, who had remarked that William Rossetti differed from Ruskin in his opinion of the American Civil War, that Rossetti's notions were of no importance when compared with Carlyle's, and that his knowledge of art was simply what he had picked up from Dante Gabriel and himself. When this letter was published, William Rossetti had written to Ruskin to protest, and Ruskin had replied: "I never had any intention of keeping that phrase in the reprint. . . . When we had our last talk over Japan art, my soliloquy to myself was simply this: 'What a pity that fellow, ingenious as he is—lets his Brother cram his crotchets down his throat. I wish I hadn't lost sight of him for so long, I would have kept him straighter'. . . . Then I've become much more arrogant and sulky than ever I was—and I was bad enough before. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This was the attitude which, despite a disarming ingenuousness, had already lost Ruskin so many painter friends: but there was little in his remarks about Carlyle which justified the venerable and choleric prophet's passionate indignation.

In another of the originally published letters, Ruskin had reported a conversation of Carlyle's, quoting his sources, in which Carlyle had said that "In the streets of Chelsea, and of the whole district of London round it, from the Park to the outer country (some twelve or fifteen miles of disorganised, foul, sinful and most wretched life) he could not now walk without being insulted, chiefly because he was a grey, old man, and also because he was cleanly dressed—these two conditions of him being wholly hostile, as the mob of the street felt, to their own instincts, and, so far as they appeared to claim some kind of reverence and recognition of betterment, to be instantly crushed and jeered out of the way". <sup>2</sup>

That Carlyle, during one of his famous private rhetorical fulminations, said some such thing, there can be no doubt. Ten years later, in fact (6 September, 1876), Allingham noted in his diary that the old man had told him how, when he was in the habit of riding about the suburbs of London, he found that the populace looked upon him as a kind of strange unfortunate being, and that the object they proposed to themselves for the moment was to make him as much more uncomfortable as possible, to which end one evening a crowd of idlers did their best to make his horse jump over the parapet of a small bridge.

Evidently it had never occurred to him that, without express permission, Ruskin would quote his words verbatim in public;

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, pp. 480-1.

particularly as he himself knew them to belong to a kind of frenzied hyperbole to which he was particularly prone, and imagined that his audience would make due allowance for their over-statement.

Thus it was with considerable fury that he one day opened his newspaper to find that his words had been given a startling prominence in the press; and wrote off post haste to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, to say that the whole paragraph was untrue, disagreed with the facts throughout, and in essentials was curiously reverse of the facts: that it was altogether erroneous, unfounded, superfluous and absurd.

At the same time he sent Ruskin the first of several letters which Ruskin described in his diary as being "ugly", and tactfully destroyed. Thus, two days later (1 June), Ruskin felt himself obliged to write to his second "earthly Master": "I am under the sorrowful necessity of ignoring your present letter. You have given the lie direct in the most insulting terms possible to you to the man who probably of all men living most honoured you. It is just because he so honours you that he is compelled to require of you to do the right thing in this matter . . . and the right manifestly is that you justify the terms of that letter, or retract them, and that with all convenient speed."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the matter had become the subject of much public comment, and two days later *The Times* came out with a leading article about it, in which Ruskin was submitted to considerable censure. At this point, probably as the result of Ruskin's previous letter, Carlyle suddenly changed his tune, and said that he himself by no means blamed Ruskin, save in printing his name, and that while Ruskin's words had calumniated the vast number of his neighbours both in London and its suburbs who treated each other quite peaceably, he substantially agreed in all that Ruskin had said about the *canaille* of London "which class is considerably more extensive and miscellaneous, and much more dismal and disgusting than you seem to think".<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Ruskin was not satisfied even with this, and there was an interchange of further astringent and disagreeable letters. Two weeks later, however, they each saw the folly of such behaviour, and there was a reconciliation; after which the two men became even closer to each other than before.

The previous year there had been some talk of a magazine to be run by Carlyle, Ruskin and Froude, to combat the materialistic and commercial influence of the day: but Ruskin, apparently, had not been very enthusiastic. "Has Ruskin yet written to you on that periodical we, or at least I, were talking of?" Carlyle wrote to Froude on 2 August, 1866. "I did not find him bite very ardently on my first or on this second mention of the project, nor do I know what you can well answer him; nor am I to be much or perhaps at all considered

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, issue of 10.6.1867.

in it. I! alas! alas! but the thing will have to be done one day, I am well of opinion, though by whom, or how, which of us can say?"<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, as time passed, Carlyle became more and more content to think that his prophet's mantle had fallen upon Ruskin, as was Ruskin, later, to think that his had fallen upon Tolstoy: and the affectionate master-disciple relationship persisted between them unbroken until Carlyle's death.

"One day, by express desire on both sides, I had Ruskin for some hours, really interesting and entertaining," Carlyle wrote to Froude in 1869. "He is full of projects, of generous prospective activities, some of which I opined to him would prove chimerical. There is, in singular environment, a ray of real heaven in R. Passages of the last book *Queen of the Air* went to my heart like arrows."<sup>2</sup> "Don't neglect to call on me the first time you are in town," Carlyle wrote to Ruskin a few weeks later—"the sight of your face will be a comfort, and I long for a little further talk on the problems you are occupied with. . . . Come, and let us settle some *weekly* evening again: why not?" Another letter of about the same date is similarly affectionate: "What I wish now is to know if you are at home, and to see you instantly if so. *Instantly*. . . . Come, I beg, *quam primum*. Last week I got your *Queen of the Air* and read it. Euge! Euge! No such Book have I met with for long years past. The one soul now in the world who seems to feel as I do in the highest matters, and speaks *mir aus dem Herzen* exactly what I wanted to hear."<sup>3</sup>

And when Ruskin left Denmark Hill and settled at Brantwood, Carlyle wrote to his brother in Dumfries that he was deeply anxious about him. Indeed, the inherent weakness in his character caused him continual misgivings. "I am reading Ruskin's Books in these evenings," he wrote to this same brother again in February 1872. "I find a real spiritual comfort in the noble fire, wrath, and inexorability with which he smites upon all base things and wide-spread public delusions, and insists relentlessly on having the ideal aimed at everywhere; for the rest, I do not find him wise,—headlong rather, and I might even say weak. But there is nothing like him in England in these other respects. . . ." <sup>4</sup>

Two years later, when Ruskin was once more paying him regular weekly visits, he wrote again: "I get but little real insight out of him, though he is full of friendliness and is aiming as if at the very stars; but his sensitive, flighty nature disqualifies him for earnest conversation and frank communication of his secret thoughts. . . ." <sup>5</sup>

Allingham, in January 1878, recorded how Carlyle spoke of Ruskin with admiration, saying that there was a celestial brightness in him.

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. 2, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 1.10.1869: *Works*, vol. 19, p. lviii.

<sup>4</sup> *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. A. Carlyle, vol. 2, p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 310.

"His description of the wings of birds is the most beautiful thing of the kind there can possibly be. His morality, too, is the highest and purest. And with all this, a wonderful folly at times!"<sup>1</sup>

Thirteen months later, the amiable Irishman met Ruskin on the stairs as they were both paying a visit to Cheyne Row, and noticed how affectionately the two men greeted each other: how Ruskin knelt upon the floor, leaning over Carlyle as they talked: and how, at parting, he affectionately kissed the old man's hands.

Ruskin on his side never wavered in admiration and devotion, and would sign his letters to the master: "Ever your loving disciple—son, I have almost a right to say—in what is best of power in me." "I tell you once for all," he wrote in *Fors Clavigera*, "Carlyle is the only living writer who has spoken the absolute and perpetual truth about yourselves and your business; and exactly in proportion to the inherent weakness of brain in your lying guides, will be their animosity against Carlyle."<sup>2</sup>

"The death of Carlyle is no sorrow to me," Ruskin wrote to Miss Mary Gladstone, on 15 February, 1881. "It is, I believe, not an end—but a beginning of his real life. Nay, perhaps also of mine. My remorse, every day he lived, for having not enough loved him in the days gone by, is not greater now, but less, in the hope that he knows what I am feeling about him at this—and all other—moments."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Ruskin's view of Carlyle was never a merely sentimental one; as is evident from his attitude to the controversy that followed the publication of Froude's *Life*; and particularly in the matter of Charles Eliot Norton's denunciations, over which Ruskin wholly took Froude's part against his old friend, maintaining that Froude's portrait of the Prophet was correct and just, save for the fact that Carlyle had never been as unhappy as he liked to make out; but he had a wretched digestion and the habit of always talking about his grievances. Always deeply aware of his own failures and limitations, Ruskin was very rarely deceived as to essential character, but able to separate the virtues and the weaknesses in the characters of his friends, and to love the one while almost completely ignoring the other.

## 3

Although Ruskin was still making new friendships during these years, he was also losing many of his old ones: some, as we have seen, by estrangement, others by death. And besides the separation from Mrs. La Touche, which he felt most deeply, he lost also two other women for whom he had had great affection for many years—Mrs. Carlyle and Lady Trevelyan.

<sup>1</sup> William Allingham: *A Diary*, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 10: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 15.2.1881: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 341.

One day in April 1866, just before he was setting out for Switzerland, he ran up the front steps of the famous house in Cheyne Row, intending to say good-bye to Mrs. Carlyle, when, as the front door opened, he learned simultaneously from the down-drawn blinds and the mien of the servant that this gallant, garrulous, affectionate, acidulous and witty woman was dead. She had been taking the air that afternoon in her carriage in Hyde Park, when her lap-dog had suddenly dashed from her knee and jumped to the ground. In pursuing him, to fetch him back, she must have overstrained her heart, for when the coachman looked round some time later, he found her lolling against the cushions, dead.

Ruskin, who had planned to set out the following morning with Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan, their niece, Constance Hilliard, and his cousin Joan Agnew, whom he had long desired to show some of the places they were always talking about at home, at first kept the news to himself lest he should spoil their pleasure; an action soon circumvented by fate, as in Paris Lady Trevelyan also fell ill; and a few weeks later, in Neuchâtel, she died.

It was at this time that Ruskin was himself troubled by new and disturbing symptoms. He was assailed by sudden fits of giddiness; and sometimes a cloud would envelop his mind and a mist his eyes so powerful that he could not even draw. Once again emotional stress was beginning to have disastrous results upon his health. So much so that, the following year, finding himself still grievously unwell after a solitary holiday geologising and botanising in Scotland, where he had with him only a small part of his usual retinue—the gardener Downs who searched for rare ferns, and his valet Crawley who carried his geological specimens with a religious care—he was compelled to retire to a doctor's house in Norwood, to take a serious rest cure.

It was at this period, too, that a questing, superstitious streak in his nature, that he shared with Tolstoy and many other great men, became rapidly developed; and he took to casting his horoscope, and opening the Bible at random, in the belief that the text upon which his eye first fell must contain a special message for the day.

Although Ruskin still continued to take long holidays in Italy, in Switzerland, and in France, accompanied by his valet, his gardener, guests or dependent artists, he was now following an accustomed groove channelled out by years of habit: and these journeys gave him nothing of the ecstatic satisfaction of his youth, but often only a melancholy distaste at the change and disintegration which seemed omnipresent; so that he deliberately cherished his memories of the time when "the sweet waves of the Renso and Limmat"<sup>1</sup> (now foul with refuse of manufacture) were as crystalline as the heaven above them; when her pictured bridges and embattled towers ran unbroken

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, p. 29.



round Lucerne; when the Rhone flowed in deep-green softly dividing currents round the wooden ramparts of Geneva; and when from the marble roof of the western vault of Milan, he could watch the Rose of Italy flush in the first morning light, before a human foot had sullied its summit, or the reddening dawn on its rocks taken shadow of sadness from the crimson which, long ago, stained the ripples of Otterburn.

"I am writing where my work was first begun thirty-five years ago, within sight of the snows of the higher Alps," he wrote in his preface to *Queen of the Air*. "In that half of the permitted life of man, I have seen strange evil brought upon every scene that I best loved, or tried to make beloved by others. The light which once flushed those pale summits with its rose at dawn, and purple at sunset, is now umbered and faint; the air which once inlaid the clefts of all their golden crags with azure is now defiled with languid coils of smoke, belched from worse than volcano fires; their very glacier waves are ebbing, and their snows fading, as if Hell had breathed on them; the waters that once sank at their feet into crystalline rest are now dimmed and foul, from deep to deep and shore to shore."<sup>1</sup> "I am saddened by another kind of disorder," he had written to his mother on 18 September, 1868. "France is in everything so fallen back, so desolate and comfortless compared to what it was twenty years ago—the people so much rougher, clumsier, more uncivilised—everything they do, vulgar and base. . . ."<sup>2</sup> While in June of the following year he complained from Verona: "The perpetual irritation caused by the misery and folly of the people (an inbred folly of many generations which, if one could even grind the whole race of them in the valley of Chamouni for a mortar, with Mont Blanc upside down for a pestle, one couldn't grind out of them in one grain or tittle) are perhaps very good for me in fixing the resolutions I have been making for resistance to the evils of the times."<sup>3</sup>

"I don't think I ever heard of anyone who so mourned over his departed youth,"<sup>4</sup> Ruskin wrote to his mother from Venice in May 1870: and for the rest of his life most of his foreign travels were only to heighten his desolate sense of the days that were no more.

Nevertheless, during these journeys, he was still making vivid personal discoveries in the field of art. "This Carpaccio is a new world to me,"<sup>5</sup> he would write to Burne-Jones, or: "You ask me why I say that Tintoret is *too* awful—" to his mother; "I mean that he stands so alone and is so grand that not one person in a thousand can reach up to him, and he is useless to the world from his greatness."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 19, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 18.9.1868: *Works*, vol. 19, p. xli.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 15.6.1869: *Works*, vol. 19, p. li.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 30.5.1870: *Works*, vol. 20, p. li.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 13.5.1869: *Letters on Art and Literature* by J. Ruskin, ed. T. J. Wise, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of 21.6.1870: *Works*, vol. 20, p. li.

Or, to Mrs. Cowper: "Filippo Lippi has brought me into a new world, being a complete monk, yet an entirely noble painter."<sup>1</sup> To the end of his life, he was to feel himself engaged in a losing battle to preserve the glories of the past: "My time is passed in a fierce, steady struggle to save all I can every day, as a fireman from a smouldering ruin, of history or aspect," he wrote to Miss Susan Beever in 1874. "To-day, for instance, I've been just in time to ascertain the form of the crown of the Emperor, representing the power of the State in the greatest *political* fresco of old times—fourteenth century. By next year, it may be next month, it will have dropped from the wall with the vibration of the railway outside, and be touched up with new gilding for the mob."<sup>2</sup>

But his mood became more and more frequently one of disillusionment and disgust, such as caused him to cry out at last in Florence in 1882: "Everywhere pavours, masons, ruin—degradation, folly, and noise; and the wretched Germans, English, and Yankees busy about it like dung-flies."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1.7.1870: *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 25.8.1874: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 6.10.1882: *Works*, vol. 33, p. xli.

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## Chapter VI

1. *Rose at eighteen: Percy La Touche's engagement to Joan Agnew: Rose's visit to Ruskin: a bitter misunderstanding: explanation to Mrs. Cowper: Ruskin writes to George MacDonald: Mrs. Cowper again intervenes: Rose makes her peace.* 2. *Rose's dual personality: Ruskin's humour reasserts itself.* 3. *Rose forbidden by her parents to write to him again: Ruskin's despair: Mrs. La Touche consults a solicitor: she writes to Mrs. Millais: a legal opinion: the true state of the case: attitude of the Millais: Ruskin's defence to Mrs. Cowper: his interview with George MacDonald: Mrs. Cowper appeals to Mrs. La Touche: Ruskin's bitterness: Mrs. La Touche defends herself to Mrs. Cowper.*

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I

BY THE end of 1867, Rose had grown into a tall, slender, beautiful and gifted girl, always balanced precariously upon the edge of physical and psychic ill health. "Rose was tall and brightly fair," Ruskin wrote of her years later to a friend; "her face of the most delicately chiselled beauty—too severe to be entirely delightful to all people—the eyes grey, and, when she was young, full of play; after the sad time came, the face became nobly serene—and of a strange beauty—so that once a stranger, seeing her for the first time, said 'she looked like a young sister of Christ's'."<sup>1</sup> At times witty and almost childishy exuberant, at times morbidly introspective, she was equally at home seated upon a horse, or conversing upon the most erudite subjects of the day. Widely read, and passionately radical in her views, she combined Ruskin's sensitive social conscience with a fervent belief in dogmatic evangelicalism. One day, she would dance all evening in her best dress and with obvious enjoyment, at the servants' ball which she had chosen as her birthday party: another, she would kneel down and pray during a reception for the recovery from illness of one of her girl friends, with such fervour that the whole of the guests also suddenly found themselves upon their knees. Often the natural sweetness of her disposition was tempered with a strange asperity. "Perhaps she will show you she is not always a sweetness," Mrs. La Touche had written of her once to Mrs. MacDonald; "or if she is, it's the sweetness of the wild fruit, and the thorn guarded flower—and so best."<sup>2</sup>

When she caught measles at a party for poor people given by Mrs. Cowper, her recovery was, so Mrs. La Touche wrote to Mrs. Mac-

<sup>1</sup> *John Ruskin in the Eigbries, The Outlook*, 21.10.1899.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from 4 Upper Grosvenor Street, London; original with Mr. G. Leon.



XXV. ROSE LA TOUCHE

*From a facsimile made by Mrs Sydney Morse and Edward Hughes of the drawing  
by John Ruskin*



XXVI. LILY ARMSTRONG, LATER LILY KEVILL DAVIS

*From a sketch in water-colour by John Ruskin*

Donald, quite remarkable. "She attributes it to her excessive temperance, which makes me laugh," her mother added. "The truth is that she lives nearly upon air and yet has more physical strength and energy than most girls (and many boys) of her age, and she has only *too much* moral force. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

1867 had been a significant year for the La Touches. Percy had come of age; and later in the year had become engaged to Joan Agnew: owing to the death of his brother, Mrs. La Touche had been obliged to sell much of his property: and towards the end of the year Rose, who hitherto seemed to have been unusually well, was stricken with one of her mysterious attacks, and had to be sent to a nursing-home. Lily Armstrong, daughter of Sergeant Armstrong, M.P., and one of Ruskin's especial pets at Winnington, went to see her there, and found that, owing to a mood of violence, she had been strapped down to her bed.

Now Lily Armstrong had kept up an affectionate correspondence with Ruskin for several years (he used to have her to stay sometimes at Denmark Hill, and signed his letters to her "Birdie"), and she was so deeply concerned by Rose's appearance of deep sadness that at the end of January 1868, she wrote to Ruskin to tell him of it. "Yes, my dearest Lily, Miss La Touche is my old Rose—I saw her often, this time two years ago," Ruskin replied. "She was as tall then as she is now. She *ought* to look sad—and very sad—and that for many a day to come. For *all* days to come in this world. . . ."

For Ruskin, at this time, was going through another period of deep emotional stress. Rose had promised to write him a letter for Christmas, and this letter had never arrived. In despair, he wrote to Mrs. Cowper that she had cursed the day forever to him into darkness with her broken faith. "I went roaming about all Christmas day and the day after—so giddy and wild that in looking back to it I can understand the worst thing that men can ever do."<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to know, from the series of long, passionate and incoherent letters that Ruskin addressed to Mrs. Cowper throughout the following month, exactly what happened, though the nature of the terrible misunderstandings which further confused the issue between them is clear enough. At some time during February, after she had left the nursing-home, Ruskin and Rose had evidently contrived to meet, and Ruskin, in accordance with the permission given two years before, once more asked her formally to become his wife. Rose's attitude on this occasion was, unknown to Ruskin, probably much influenced by medical opinion; since doctors had recently told her mother that the only chance she had of regaining and maintaining normal health was by renouncing all thought of marriage. On the other hand, it may also, or even entirely, have been occasioned by

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 4.3.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

her having been shown, either by her mother or by some woman friend, a copy of the decree of annulment of Ruskin's former marriage.

"She wished me to be Lover and Friend to her always—no more," Ruskin wrote to Mrs. Cowper on 4 March. "She spoke fearlessly, as a woman in Shakespeare would have done—as the purest women are always able to do, if left unspoiled. She thought it was what I wished, as it had been so with my first wife. On my refusal, she refused all that she *could* refuse. She cannot, my love nor my sorrow."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, before he had left her, she had also told him still to trust God and her. So still he was left with the torturing hope of uncertainty.

But not for long. The following day he received a message from her in which she said: "There is nothing but this frail 'cannot' to separate our life and love," and expressed her gratitude to her friend Lady Higginson for helping to bring her through so much sorrow. Frantic with despair, Ruskin, to Rose's later passionate indignation, wrote impulsively to this Lady Higginson, to ask the meaning of her words: and this letter was undoubtedly used by Rose's advisers in order to help to persuade her now to give him up finally and forever.

"Remember . . ." Ruskin wrote in explanation to Mrs. Cowper, who was still his confidante in the affair, "I had loved Rosie since she was ten years old. I saw her first in 1858 (autumn). I had no thought within me—ever since—but was in some part of it hers. For months of solitude among the hills—I have had *no other* thought. Well, at last I had my dream changed into hope. Then into certainty—I entirely trusted in her love—and in this joy I had dwelt—binding my whole soul upon it with cords of love—as to an altar.

"In an instant, wholly without warning came this stern—final, fearful word of death—and only resting on this strange sentence unexplained. . . . Now—remember—as far as you know them—and you know not the thousandth part of them—the strains of passion I had to bear during these many years—and then this at the end! It drove me quite wild—and I had no power of thought—but was utterly stunned and broken: the wonder to me only is, how I was not struck with some fatal pang of brain. But the one thing that burnt itself into me was that she could not have done this unless there was some fatal bar in herself preventing the fulfilment of marriage. . . . I totally misunderstood the last part of her letter—saying that Lady Higginson had helped her *through all this*—and I thought Lady Higginson was wholly in her confidence. How else could she have helped her—or told her what was right?

"Well—the one thing I wanted to know was whether this that I feared was the truth—I could not *think*—nor judge—nor stir out of my trance of pain until I knew this. For the question instantly came

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

to me—"God knows how thankfully I would take her—by whatever law of life we were bound—but if a *second* time an evil report goes forth about my marriage—my power of doing good by any teaching may be lost—and lost forever. And this was a fearful question to me—above all personal ones. It was all so solemn and dreadful that I had no thought of restrictions of word or 'delicacies' of thought—all heaven was at stake on this one question.

"And the substance of what I wrote was this . . . 'She says "You love us both!" You *could* not have allowed her to write me this letter unless there had been some fatal reason. Tell it me—I cannot think—I cannot judge—for her or myself—till I know. Is there incapacity of marriage? If there be—still I will not give up hope—but the question is a fearful one—whether I might not then finally confirm the calumnies before arisen out of my former history—and I am not now thinking of myself—no, nor even of Her—in dreading this—but of the loss of such usefulness as is in me—but now—I cannot think. Answer me this—one word—Yes or No—by telegraph. Then I can think. Nay—do not—it would be like trusting the child's life to the iron and file. I will wait till you can write—but tell me what she means.'

"It is not unforgivable, it seems to me. If she thinks so—I will rend her out of the poor wreck of life she has left me—and never name her more. There were one or two other things in the letter that might have hurt her, about religion, and the way she separated herself from me by religious words when I had told her they were useless—but I do not suppose these were the hurt. . . .

"Pray answer me one word, as soon as may be—saying if this sin is in your judgment so unpardonable. And if not, surely you see how cruel she has been.

"For she can never redeem what she has done—now—even if she is ever mine. The suffering since that day of horror has been to me so ghastly that it can never be forgotten—scorched into the holiest—highest of what I was—with its black, eternal scar. I never so much as see a flower without a sense of treachery—in both worlds. . . .

"Stay, there was one other thing that might have offended her, if misunderstood. . . . I said: 'She talks of being my friend. But I would only waste away in weary longing for her—as I have done in these sad past years. I might live, by training myself all away into some lower mechanical life. But she would miss me, would not she. . . .

"Can you not write one word to her—and say if this (this whole letter, I mean—a mere cry of stupefied pain) was the cause, how cruel she has been? You may say—why did you not write to her? First, she gave me no means and Lady H. might simply have refused to deliver the letter. And at least it would have lost a day to the Sunday . . . but mainly it was to spare her the pain of reply. I knew that she had been repeatedly to Dublin to see physicians—and if what I



feared was so—I supposed this friend of hers, whose influence her mother valued so highly—would know more of the truth than she did herself.

“I have not told you half of what I have had to bear, that day—I felt the whole letter so hard, selfish, religiously tyrannous, humanly weak, and false to her very words of the day before—‘Trust in God and me’. And both failed—as it seemed—in one instant—for I had day by day all the year prayed to him through her words.”

With this letter Ruskin enclosed Lady Higginson’s reply. “That she should think it could all end thus! I did not believe she had ever known of its being written!”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently Mrs. Cowper was able to discover exactly what had happened and was deeply sympathetic, for presently Ruskin wrote to her again. “You letter comforts me in interpreting—but does not comfort in transferring the cause of silence to this error of mine however great, or painful to her it may have been. For it was an inevitable one. I cannot ask pardon for it.

“I have done Rose *no* wrong from the hour when she entered the room as a child of ten years old, to this instant. I have loved, honoured, cherished—trusted—forgiven—and all these limitlessly. For her I have borne every form of insult. For her, I have been silent in pain—for her I have laboured and wept; for her I have died, for my heart is dead within me. And if, now, she cannot pardon, nay, if she even counts as a sin *needing* pardon, my belief that she dared not cast away this so great love, unless in sure knowledge of some fatal obstacle to our marriage, such as she could only have obtained by conversation with other women (how else could she have known how I lived with my former wife)—if—I say, she holds *this* for a sin in me—it is I whose forgiveness would be withdrawn. The very greatness of my love would make such sin against it, infinite.

“If she chooses, because I thought of her as a woman, not a child—because I thought her so pure and holy that no knowledge could stain, and no dishonour touch her—because I believed her word of pledge to me inviolable, unless by mortal compelling of Fate—because I did *not* believe that in breaking that pledge, she could have been comforted by any friend who did not know the reason of her doing so—but was advising her to baseness and falsehood in the name of religion—to call these sins against her, and regrets my love—Be it so. But I do not believe it; nor will you, when you are able to measure this thing with your now perfect knowledge of it. I have never rejected *her*. She, without mercy—without appeal—without a moment of pause, rejected *me*. And now—I will take her for Wife—for Child—for Queen—for any Shape of fellow spirit that her soul can wear, if she will be loyal to me with her love.

“But if not—let her go her way, and stain every stone of it with

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

my blood upon her feet, forever. Mine will be shorter. The Night is far spent. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

By now, it is clear enough, the uncertainty of the situation had reduced Ruskin to a confusion of mind bordering upon frenzy: and that this condition was further aggravated by Percy La Touche unexpectedly and clumsily having broken off his engagement with Joan Agnew. To George MacDonald, while in this state, he now wrote, on 7 March: ". . . Will you pardon my asking you what are your relations with Mrs. La Touche—and if they are beneficial to you—or could without much loss, be broken off? You perhaps do not know that Percy La Touche was engaged to my cousin six months ago, and broke off the engagement in so dastardly a way that I cannot, in looking back to all things—believe that it was wholly his own doing—but the mother's *through* his weakness—be that as it may: the conditions between Miss La Touche and me have now reached nearly to the darkness of the story of the Bride of Lammermuir—the mother got her, after she had stayed staunch and true for these last two years—at last into her power, through—as far as I can trace—the influence of an evangelical friend on Rose—and the child gave me up. The mother wrote lie after lie about her for some time after that to my cousin—but at last, in the vilest and cruellest way, abandoned my cousin also—and I know from other sources that Rose is suffering, I do not know how far or in what way—but I know she is suffering, and I cannot reach her. This also I know—that her mind is in a strange wild state, in which there is great peril—not because she cares for me (for except in pity, and in child-like trust, she does not)—but because her conscience is in continual doubt and strain—and that all, by the mother's fault, is blackening on to something that *may* be like the worst of invented tragedy—there is no saying how terrible—perhaps for the child—and assuredly—even already—for me. So that I do not think you can well and rightly continue that woman's friend and mine. \*And mine you *must* be, whatever you think—or do—in this. . . ."

George MacDonald, not unnaturally, wished to hear the whole story before he could come to any decision, and a few days later wrote to suggest a meeting. "No—not to-morrow, please," Ruskin replied. "I have had too much of my thought already turned into the dark ways, and cannot speak any more just now. I have perhaps already said too much. You must not act just now—when it is time—I will tell you—and then you must act merely as you choose on the fact that one of your friends says another is his murderer and that other says he lies. You can have no more evidence on either side. I am not going to bring *this* case into court. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 7.3.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Denmark Hill; original with Mr. G. Leon.

Everything in Ruskin's mind was still subservient to the thought of somehow getting Rose back. "Surely it would be now right for you to say to Rose that she had been mistaken and cruel," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper the following day, "and knew not what she was still doing—that she owed it to me in strictest duty to put an end to this torture of doubt—one way or another—and that she *could* only do so by determining in calm and patient thought—with full understanding of all things, what was right for us both. She at present knows hardly anything certainly of herself—and nothing of me, except through mists of broken words and thoughts.

"I *would* write to the mother—in all gentleness, if it would be of the least avail, but be assured it would not.

"And, so far from being unwilling to receive Rose in the way she wished—I should rejoice in it wholly, for my part. But every human creature has hissed and shrieked at me, for, as they said—not knowing the nature of girls, and making my former wife miserable, by this very thing.

"But I will face the world for her—if she will so trust me—if she will not, she has destroyed my life.

"There is no need for her decision yet—let her forget her past anger like a dream—let her be faithful to the pledge she gave me—and let her write to me, as she used to do—that we may know each other's hearts again.

"The law which only gives her liberty of action in a year—is a merely human one. She is as much bound to obey her parents, in all lawful things not injuring others, after she is twenty-one, as before—And she is as much bound to disobey her parents—if they command her to commit injury to others, *now*, as she would be then. It seems to me that a firm expression on your part to her and to the parents, of the wrong you know to have been done to me, would enable her to write to me—or to you about me. Things cannot go on as they are—and they have already gone on, thus, too long. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Ruskin had himself once more written to Rose's parents, and on 19 March gloomily communicated to Mrs. Cowper his unsuccess. "The intense hostility of the parents now (in answer to a stern statement of facts which I gave them the other day) proceeding even to the length of gross and indecent insult—while it in no wise diminishes my chance of success—very materially affects the probability of happy future relations with them—not on their side—but mine. I do not know quite—how much I could forgive, for love's sake. But I can more easily conceive the fulfilment of any personal sacrifice—than the forgiveness of certain words and acts. I could die for Rosie, if it were my duty to do so—rejoicingly—but I cannot feel as if I could ever see her father's face without scornful anger. . . ." A few days later he wrote to Mrs. Cowper again: "The father's letter

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 15.3.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

to me was insolent in the last degree (I enclose it with my answer) and I have never been able to do the slightest good by any appeal or reasoning, to or with him; I answered it firmly—not uncourteously—but I do not know what to tell him now—which those letters he has read have failed to tell him.

“To the Mother—who thinks me ‘faithless to her’—what can I more say? Which of us is really faithless to the other—She—who caused me years of pining misery and doubt by words concerning her daughter which now she calls it treachery to repeat—or I—who never spoke word of any human being of which I feared the repetition to them or to all the world?

“But for her, any *one* of Rosie’s many letters would have given me passionate joy and peace; and there were years of life in every sentence of them. *She* destroyed them all—slowly murdered me day by day—and now she calls it treason because I cannot lay my whole heart bare to the woman I love, without also telling her what it was that so long kept me from esteeming or understanding the deep grace she did me.

“Yet I can forgive the mother all this—but there is one thing I now never shall forgive—the miserable selfishness with which she now broods in anger over the momentary estrangement between her daughter and her (accusing me of it instead of herself) and has no remorse for the sorrow she has caused me—nor thought seemingly—for the bitterest sorrow which she hopes for ever to dwell within me.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no evidence as to whether Mrs. Cowper wrote to Mrs. La Touche—but she certainly wrote to Rose, and when Rose replied, she evidently sent Ruskin one of her usual virtuous exhortations. But even less than ever was Ruskin in the mood to be impressed by pious words. “For the few words that came . . . in your last night’s letter—I am thankful,” he wrote on 21 March. “But I want you yourself to feel more distinctly the Law of Justice and plain sense—by which she—as all others—is bound to test herself. As soon as you feel it strongly—you will be able to impress her with it also. . . . Her business is wholly and solely, with her own mistakes and stupidity. . . . When she breaks her word to me on Christmas day—and after ten years of my waiting and weary love—dismisses me by the word of a Stranger, she has no business to write to you—nor ought you to allow her to do—about the possibly beneficial effects on my mind. She has nothing whatever to do with God’s dealings with my mind. She ought to know—or to be told—and convinced that she has done (through false teaching and her own constant dwelling on her own sensations instead of other people’s)—an ineffably false and cruel deed—and that she has to repent of it—and undo it—as soon as may be. What the effect on my mind actually has been—if she cares to know it—is this—that my ideal of womanhood is destroyed—and irrevocably—that

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

my love and tenderness to all men is greatly deadened—my own personal happiness in *any* love, destroyed—my faculties greatly injured—so that I cannot now command my thoughts except in a broken way—and such bitterness mixed with my love for her, that though it is greater than ever—and possesses me even more fatally than ever—it is partly poisoned love, mixed with distrust and scorn—and even if she comes to me now, whatever she may be to me hereafter—though she were Portia and Virgilia in one—I should and shall—always say ‘she has cost me too dear’.”<sup>1</sup>

And when, a few days later, Mrs. Cowper sent him Rose’s letter to read for himself, Ruskin cared for the temper of her messages even less: “. . . I wish you had a little more capacity of indignation,” he told her in reply. “Can you not at least point out to her the fearful wrong of listening to reports of my words when she is not allowed to hear the words themselves or ask her how she dared to break her promise of writing on Christmas day and breaking it in anger. . . . Of course I know she meant to do right—But theft and murder—and betrayal of true love are sins positive, at whosoever’s command committed—and under whatsoever conviction—and the baseness of her thought of me that *I* wished to give her pain, because I was in pain myself—is. But does the child suppose—is she mad enough to suppose, that I would have been silent all this time, as I have been, unless to avoid hurting her in her phase of grief? . . . She says she will always love me with her child love—Let her see me then as a child—to speak to me and be with me—and I will live for such love as she can give me.

“But she need not think to reverse God’s law and make it good for man to be alone. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, despite misunderstandings which seemed daily to become more obscure and more involved, Rose, on her own initiative, soon wrote him one of the long and affectionate letters he had used to love. “My dearest,” he wrote to Mrs. Cowper as soon as he had read it, “she is mine and nothing can come between us any more, unless in some future day she is surprised by the love she yet knows not of for another—and if that should be—I will surrender her in peace of heart as I shall know then that God bids me.

“But now, He has given her to me and except by His word of Love or Death, we cannot be separated more.”<sup>3</sup> And in his diary that night he wrote the one word, “Peace”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 21.3.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 30.3.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, 4.5.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary*, 4.5.1868: *Works*, vol. 19, p. xxxviii.

The frustration, the bafflement before an enigma impossible to read, which had tortured Ruskin in the past, and was to torture him even more keenly in the future, was more than the frustration which any passionate lover must feel when confronted with the indifference of a woman who does not love him. It was more poignant and of a more precarious nature, than the frustration of Swann over Odette, or Marcel over Albertine, not because Rose was indifferent as they were, but because her emotions and reactions towards him continually altered in relation to her temporary susceptibility to the people about her, and in relation to her state of health. "Two women have inhabited me," wrote a talented Englishwoman whose happiness also was destroyed by a "similar" tragedy "which came whole out of the hands of Fate"—two women also inhabited Rose La Touche—and her personality became more perilously divided as her mysterious malaise increased. Rose well, wrote Ruskin letters of a spontaneous and beguiling beauty, full of affection, intelligence and humour: Rose ill—tormented by the resistance of those around her, became harsh and alien, withdrawing herself completely, or else cruelly accusing him of nameless sins.

For the moment, however, in anguish no longer, Ruskin's innate sense of humour very soon reasserted itself. "I have been thinking often and often—with a little low laugh, of what the critics would call my contradiction of myself in my two last letters," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper four days later, "one saying of Rosie that nothing can ever come between us more, and the other, that we might quarrel perfectly before a month was out, over a point of Divinity. But you know, there's no contradiction. The one means that we shall never more doubt each other—shall always love—the other—that she might resolve in the most resolute manner never to be my wife—if I didn't believe on her authority that two and two were seven.

"I am more and more amused, more and more saddened, more and more puzzled, as I read and re-read her last letter: it is in one light so exquisitely presumptuous and foolish—in another, so royally calm and divine. The utter freedom from the consciousness of any wilful sin, all her life, and of her continued faith in her present God, makes her the most glorious little angel, and the most impertinent little monkey, that ever tormented true love's or foolish old friend's heart. I can no more talk to her than I could to a fawn or a peewit:—but the white Doe of Rylstone or the Dove of the ark couldn't be more divine messengers, or more to be revered in their narrow natures.

"What shall I do with her? I can't reason with her, or she would have a headache. I can't tell her she is a little goose—because she doesn't know the difference between that and anything else—I can't let her go on lecturing me as if she were the Archangel Michael and

the Blessed Virgin in one—because flesh and blood won't stand it—and I can't show her that I don't need to be lectured—because I should then have to show her that Papa and Mama *do*. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

But Ruskin was not to remain in this agreeable dilemma for long. A few days later he crossed to Dublin with Joan Agnew, where he was to lecture upon *The Mystery of Life and its Arts*, and there he found another note from Rose waiting for him as soon as he arrived. “I am forbidden by my father and mother to write to you or receive a letter.”<sup>2</sup> Enclosed in the envelope, as though for consolation, were two rose leaves. “I had nearly thrown up lecture and everything yesterday when that note came,” he told Mrs. Cowper the following day. “However, I tried to fancy the difference between getting a note with two rose leaves in it and getting none, and so I did my lecture as well as I could: but my voice failed me a little from heaviness of heart.”<sup>3</sup> And at this moment of shock, he was so bewildered that all he could do was to seek her advice. “Now I hope at last you *will* have some capacity of indignation, and power of expressing it to the right person. In the meantime I shall be quite still and do no mischief till I have your counsel and help. Write here quickly. The letter of mine to which this of hers *ought* to have been in answer has (I hope) put the child at rest as far as regards her thoughts of me—being simply what you wished me to have answered to her first letter of all—do you remember? So that if she had read it—all must be at rest between us, but it is question whether the Mother has not got first hold of it, and merely given the child my address here out of it—but I cannot fancy Rose would allow this even with all her filial “piety” after the injunction again given to me to keep all that she said sacred. . . .

“Now—will you not write firmly to the Mother warning her in some way against tormenting her child more—and saying what you begin to feel about it? Or what will you do?

“My own purpose is to go on doing all the good I can, retaining my vow of writing to no one except words of necessity. I shall be stronger in patience now, knowing that she is not angry with me any more.”<sup>4</sup>

Ruskin's lecture was intended to have been held in the theatre of the Royal College of Science; but so great had been the demand for tickets that it had to be transferred to the Concert Hall of the Exhibition Palace. “At the end of it, while I was talking to the people behind me,” he told Mrs. Cowper, “a man came up with a rather large white paper parcel, which he said he was to give into my own

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 8.5.1868, from Winnington Hall, Northwich; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 13.5.1868, from 4 Merrion Square, Dublin; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, 14.5.1868, from Dublin; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter, 13.5.1868, from 4 Merrion Square, Dublin; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

hand. I took it ungraciously thinking it some troublesome person and carried it carefully home—when at last I opened it, I found a large cluster of the *Erba della Madonna* in bloom, which was always considered as *my* plant, at Harristown—enclosed in two vine-leaves, and in the midst of it, two bouquets, one a rose half open with lilies of the valley, and a sweet scented geranium leaf,—the other a pink with lilies of the valley, and a green and white geranium leaf—this second bouquet puzzles me and confuses the message—do you think it could be meant for Joanna, or what does the pink mean in flower language? I trust by this she has received my letter written on Sunday safely—though she is forbidden to answer. I hope she also would have firmness enough to let no one else read it, for unless they understood all as well as you do, they might justly blame me for it—being simply the confirmed promise to be just what she chose I should be to her for ever. But it is strange that if she did not show it them, the Mother has so instantly succeeded in altering the father's determination again to evil. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin was thinking of buying a house in Ireland at this time, and went in an Irish car to County Wicklow to see one, accompanied by Joan Agnew, Lily Armstrong and Miss Napier, another of his old pupils from Winnington. It was a magnificent drive, through wildernesses of blossoming hawthorn and rills blazing with gorse. Miss Napier's brother, who was driving, sang wild Irish songs, and the three girls joined in when they could. But all the time Ruskin was still deeply troubled about Rose. "I will be very good," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper on 19 May. "But I want to be wise as well as good for her, and I do not know how to be so or how to keep her from being unhappy just now—why should anything make her unhappy, when her hope of love is forever, not doubtfully and at moments like mine—but assured and steadfast? Yes, I am capable of all forgiveness, but in your sense of this—and deep religious hope—are you enough clear in your conviction of absolute wrong? have you clearly enough yet expressed it to both her parents? For, is there anyone who knows the facts—who thinks them right? John Simon, for instance, said of them after what they had done to Joanna, 'They are people ignorant of all human relations'—and what I wrote to you did not refer to Percy's conduct, but to his Mother's instantly ceasing to write to Joanna as soon as she had got them separated. Then—how far do you mean her obedience to her Parents to extend? I hold a child as much bound to right obedience at twenty-two as at twenty—and as much bound to disobey in clear light of other duties at twenty as at twenty-two. She *is* disobedient in not casting me off altogether and being resolved in that—she ought not to allow herself to be made miserable. I never in all my life allowed my father's or mother's word to interfere in the smallest particular in which I was positive of my

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 14.5.1868, from Dublin; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.



duty to some other person and they wished me to violate it. But if she can be happy now, so can I be under any law she chooses to obey. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But although he had written to his mother but five days before: "I've got a line from Mrs. Cowper enclosing one from Rose, in which she says I *may* tell you that this has been a happy May to me, happy enough to throw a light over all the rest of the year, however cloudy that may be," Ruskin was not permitted to know even the bitter peace of resignation for very long.

Now, with an even greater intensity, he might have written, as he had written to William Ward at the end of the previous October: "I have *no* affections, having had them, three times over, torn out of me by the roots,—most fatally the last time, within the last year. I hope to be kind and just to all persons, and of course I *like* and dislike; but my word 'affectionately' means only—that I *should* have loved people, if I were not dead."<sup>2</sup>

## 3

By now Mrs. La Touche must have realised that it was useless to pretend either to herself or to anyone else that Rose had no particular affection for Ruskin. Perhaps she had even reached the stage when she might have given her reluctant consent to some sort of tentative engagement. Whether this was the case, or whether she did so only in the final determination to sever her daughter from Ruskin completely, she now adopted a course of action that was to have the most fatal consequences for both those frustrated and tormented lovers. She consulted a solicitor, and she wrote to Mrs. Millais.

It is singularly fortunate that the copy of the solicitor's opinion, which was later sent by Mrs. La Touche to Mrs. Cowper, has been preserved. "Among the circumstances which according to Canon and Statute Law make a marriage *null and void*," he had informed her, "is the fact of impotence. No clergyman if previously aware of this (which must not be on hearsay conjecture, but by some known Public Proof, such as a previous divorce upon this ground) could consent to perform such a marriage—the performance of which would be a profanation of the marriage ceremony." The clergyman would not, however, be liable to a penalty, for the marriage being from the first null and void, he would not be considered as having performed a marriage, but only the semblance of a marriage.

"Burns, in his *Ecclesiastical Law*, states that if it be discovered, after a man has been divorced on the plea of impotency, that he is not really impotent, the divorce is *ipso facto* annulled, and the former marriage is held good.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 19.5.1868, from Stephen's Green (Dublin); original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from John Ruskin to William Ward*, ed. T. J. Wise, vol. 1, p. 91.

"In the case submitted, the parties would either contract a marriage that would be a nullity—or else, if the lady *should* have children, they would necessarily be illegitimate. For, if they be her husband's, he would be liable to an action for bigamy, and the second marriage would be nullified by that. Her husband could only escape an action of bigamy by her admission of adultery."<sup>1</sup>

It is understandable enough that such an opinion could only have confirmed Mrs. La Touche in the decision that all thought of marriage between Ruskin and her daughter was impossible. The tragedy of the situation was that the opinion was incorrect. Had the annulment of marriage been obtained by collusion, then it could have been later invalidated: but the fact that Ruskin did not choose to defend himself, although, as is evident from his recent letters to Mrs. Cowper, he certainly did not consider himself to be impotent, would certainly not have amounted to collusion had the case been brought before the courts.

According to the actual facts, the annulment of marriage was obtained after Euphemia Gray had submitted to a medical examination, and had been discovered to be both "*virgo intacta and apta viro*": and there was no other evidence of any kind to suggest that Ruskin was organically impotent, even were it assumed (which is by no means proven by the fact that he did not consummate his marriage) that he was functionally so. And although three years or more of cohabitation without the consummation of marriage was considered by the Ecclesiastical Court to be a sufficient proof of incurable impotence: after the establishment of the Civil Divorce Court, such evidence would no longer have been regarded as sufficient. But even had Ruskin been functionally impotent, it has always been recognised that a man may be impotent with one particular woman while not impotent generally; and this plea had in fact been raised by the Earl of Essex in the famous case in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when Lady Essex obtained the annulment of her marriage, although Essex declared that he was impotent only in respect of her; and both parties were declared free to marry again. By 1868, moreover, all matters of divorce were settled in Civil Courts; and the attitude of the Courts of Common Law is shown by Bury's case, which was also decided in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Bury had been divorced on the plea of impotence, and had subsequently remarried: and it was held by the court that the children of his second marriage were legitimate on the ground that as the first marriage had been dissolved both parties were free to remarry; and although the second marriage was voidable on the grounds that the Church had been deceived in the foundation of their sentence, yet until it was dissolved it remained a marriage and the issue lawful. Indeed, although Shelford states:

<sup>1</sup> Solicitor's opinion: copy in Mrs. La Touche's handwriting, now held by Mrs. Detmar Blow.

"By the canon law, the marriage is not absolutely dissolved; the parties are separated; and if the Church is deceived, the former marriage is to be renewed; and if a second marriage is contracted, it becomes null and void"<sup>1</sup>—a state of affairs which had already caused Sir J. Nicholl to say, "What a state to place the parties in. This is something in the text law which I cannot readily assent to belong to the law of this country"—he categorically asserts elsewhere: "Where a marriage is declared by the Ecclesiastical Court to be null and void for some cause existing prior to the marriage, the parties are of course at liberty to contract a second marriage."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the act of 1857 had transferred to the new Divorce Court the jurisdiction previously enjoyed by the Ecclesiastical Court, and under the new law, possibilities of bigamy and illegitimacy which may have obtained previously, no longer held good. And even before the establishment of the new Divorce Court of 1857, the temporal courts had clearly distinguished between void and voidable marriages, in order to prevent the Church from bastardising the issue of such unions after the parties themselves were dead; voidable marriages being such as were valid for all civil purposes, unless sentence of nullity was actually declared during the life-time of the parties. Thus, even had Ruskin's marriage to Rose been voidable, it could have been annulled, not as Mrs. La Touche's lawyer suggested, by his capacity, but by the proof of continued incapacity, and then only at the plea of his wife: a situation which, after the revelations already made by Ruskin, need scarcely be taken into practical account. It must also be remembered that not only did Ruskin assure MacDonald of his sexual normality; but that there is evidence that he also told George Allen that he could have defended the suit (presumably on the grounds of his wife's frigidity and reluctance), but that had he done so he would have been "saddled with the woman for life". Thus it seems clear enough that there was not only no legal barrier to Ruskin's remarriage, but that any children he begat would have been perfectly legitimate.

Such is the attitude of expert legal opinion to-day: and the mere fact that, throughout all the long, protracted dismal maze of misunderstandings, severances and reconciliations that Ruskin had undergone, and had yet to undergo, in the project of his hoped-for marriage, neither himself nor his two principal advisers, George MacDonald and William Cowper-Temple, ever considered that there was the slightest legal difficulty, would suggest that this must equally have been the case in 1868. What is tragically certain, moreover, is that Mrs. La Touche never openly based her objections upon this opinion, which might easily have been proved false, but solely upon moral grounds, which she first brought forward after her correspondence with Mrs. Millais.

<sup>1</sup> Shelford, *Law of Marriage and Divorce*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 475.

Until the year 1947, while the present volume was being prepared for press, there was unfortunately no evidence as to the exact nature of this correspondence, though much of it might be inferred from the disastrous consequences to which it led. All that remained was a note from Mrs. La Touche to Mrs. Millais thanking her for her "kind, and *most true* letter", and tendering deep and earnest gratitude for her "generosity in granting the information".

Now, however, the full text of the "kind and *most true* letter" of October, 1870, so acknowledged by Mrs. La Touche, is available for public judgement.<sup>1</sup> After a conventional expression of distress at her correspondent's worry over her daughter, Mrs. Millais writes that her second husband dislikes the idea of her being even by letter brought into touch with Rose, who, if still under Ruskin's "mischievous influence", would not be brought to see the matter in an altered light by any considerations that the writer might put before her. She compares Ruskin's professions of an ideal relation to Rose with those which she had herself received from him, and alleges that after her wedding not only did he disclaim all intention of consummating the marriage, on the ground of her physical condition, but that John James sought to persuade his son that the young bride was not in her right mind. Before Ruskin's approaches to herself, she goes on, he had been greatly attracted to a "Spanish lady", and had been deeply affected by the non-success of his suit, though at the time of his marriage to Effie he had quite got over this attachment.

After putting forward insanity as the only imaginable excuse for his conduct to herself, she speaks in the strongest and bitterest terms of his behaviour during the years of their life together. Claiming that she shared Ruskin's tastes and pursuits, and allowing that he afforded her both opportunity and means to fit herself for participation in his various artistic interests, she presses the point that only in the field of art was he capable of returning the sympathy which he sought in his relations with women, and that he was so constituted as to be quite unable to give happiness to any member of her sex. In four words—"He is quite unnatural"—she sums up her reading of his character and her final judgement on the tragedy of their married life.

She explains her long endurance of the union by the plea that she was not aware until a month before she left him that it would be possible for her to do so, and strongly denies the suggestion that Ruskin had connived at the separation, though asserting that she had earlier rejected a proposal from him that after making financial provision for her he should enter the religious life.

That Mrs. Millais, after fourteen years of happy married life, should have written to Mrs. La Touche, in answer to her enquiries,

<sup>1</sup> The full text of the letter in question will be found on pp. 254-6 of *The Order of Release: The story of John Ruskin, Effie Gray and John Everett Millais. Told for the first time in their unpublished letters.* Edited by Admiral Sir William James, G.C.B., London, John Murray, 1947.

a letter that was undoubtedly responsible for destroying Rose's trust in Ruskin for ever, may seem to-day almost inconceivable. Doubtless she justified herself by the thought that the circumstances were privileged: and possibly she managed to persuade herself that she was saving another girl from the suffering that she had undergone. For there can be no doubt that, while the only becoming thing she could have done under the circumstances would have been tactfully to decline to discuss the matter, the "information" she offered was prejudicial to Ruskin in the extreme. It is also more than likely that it was tempered rather by a deeply rooted propensity to self-justification than by any deliberate ill-will.

There can be little doubt that Mrs. Millais had suffered a considerable amount of unpleasantness, and even ostracism, after the annulment of her marriage to Ruskin. The affair was a big public scandal and, although technically innocent, she probably received a similar amount of slandering as did Ruskin. The ill-informed said that she had eloped with Millais: and even many who knew the true facts of the case thought—and said—that she ought to have reconciled herself to the situation, as thousands of other women in similar circumstances had to do. In 1854, for a woman to be unhappy and to be unloved in marriage was of far too frequent occurrence for it to arouse much sympathy, particularly amongst her own sex. Perhaps this in itself, combined with the assumption that she was wholly innocent of any fault, had helped to keep alive a very formidable sense of injury. Of the fact that the Millais, not only still, but for many years to come, nourished a very lively sense of resentment against Ruskin there is no doubt. To the Greys and to the Millais, during her marriage to Ruskin, Effie was looked upon as having been a martyr. And for her to be a martyr, Ruskin inevitably had to be represented as a monster. The young members of the Grey family were brought up to think of Ruskin with abhorrence, and, whether or not with the knowledge of their parents, the Millais children were deliberately hostile in their attitude to him. Many years later, Holman Hunt's daughter Gladys met Mary Millais unexpectedly in the High Street, Kensington, and was both shocked and surprised at a diatribe against Ruskin that she poured out at length for no apparent reason whatsoever.

But most hostile of all was the attitude of Millais himself. "She hated me as only those hate who have injured,"<sup>1</sup> Ruskin had written of Effie to Furnivall fourteen years ago: and even more truly might these bitter words have been applied to the man that she was so soon to marry. Without the passionate integrity of Hunt or the romantic imagination of Rossetti, Millais had been a young man of commonplace intellect and aspirations, endowed with an astonishing and supernormal technical brilliance. The phenomenal success that

<sup>1</sup> *An Ill-Assorted Marriage: Letter from John Ruskin to F. J. Furnivall* (Clement Shorter, 1915).

in later years was to enable him to boast before the Prince of Wales of an annual income of £35,000, and build for himself a gilded and princely mansion-studio so ostentatious that the aged Carlyle, upon being conducted up the palatial staircase, had been unable to restrain the astonished enquiry as to whether all this had really come out of a pot of paint, was the result of a vision so commonplace that it appealed at once to the widest and most uncultured taste. A true child of his period, Millais' mental horizon had always been dominated by the desire for spectacular material success—an ambition as conventional as the expensive tastes he soon learned to acquire. What suited him was the life of the wealthy country squire, heedless, comfortable with clearly defined conventional attitudes and rules. In his heart, he must have known perfectly well that Ruskin had shown him nothing but affection, and that, from the conventional point of view, his own conduct towards him had scarcely been above all censure: and it was probably this which prompted his first attitude of virtuous indignation. But this attitude had later crystallised into a narrow malevolence. This, too, may have been partly caused by treatment that had been meted out to him from unexpected quarters: for during the scandal of 1854, it was unlikely that he should have escaped an inconvenient censure. And, intensely susceptible to all that affected his career, the repercussions of the nullity suit undoubtedly caused him much indignation and distress.

For example, the collector-coachbuilder Windus had refused to permit him to go to his house to make a copy of one of his own pictures for reproduction: the Royal Academy, in 1855, had skied his pictures so shamefully that he had only been able to get them hung in suitable positions by threatening to remove them: and when the Hogarth Club was formed, Millais could not join because Ruskin was already a member. In addition, between 1855 and 1860, he had been deeply affronted by Ruskin's criticism of his works, which he seemed to have believed was inspired by personal malice. In actual fact, Ruskin's public attitude to Millais had been most correct, and in his *Academy Notes* he had alternately praised and blamed his works with a critical acumen that was curiously detached. "By much the most poetical work the painter has yet conceived; and also, so far as I know, the first instance of a perfectly painted twilight,"<sup>1</sup> he had written of *Autumn Leaves* the year following Millais' marriage. But in the following year, of the famous picture of Sir Isumbras at the Ford, where the trappings of the horse are obviously inaccurate—the picture which Frederick Sandys had parodied, with Ruskin as a beast of burden carrying Millais, Rossetti and Holman Hunt on his back—he had commented caustically: "This is not a fiasco, but a catastrophe,"<sup>2</sup> and had counselled him to return to a "quiet perfection

<sup>1</sup> *Academy Notes*, 1856: *Works*, vol. 14, pp. 66-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Academy Notes*, 1857: *Works*, vol. 14, p. 107.

of work".<sup>1</sup> Millais, at this period, when his ultimate professional success was far from being established, was almost as susceptible to adverse criticism of his work as was Rossetti: and had he received less public support, this susceptibility might have become exaggerated to the same dangerous and pathological degree. Thus when, in 1859, Ruskin was again admonitory, Millais, who had himself been used to say in earlier days that people had far better buy his work then, when he was working for fame, than later, when he would be working for a wife and family, wrote aggrievedly to his wife: "Ruskin will be disgusted this year, for all the rubbish he has been praising before being sent into the Royal Academy has now bad places. . . . He does not understand my work, which is now too broad for him to appreciate, and I think his eye is only fit to judge the portraits of insects."<sup>2</sup> The fact was, that at this time Millais' pictures no longer sold as they used to; and although he wrote again to his wife that Ruskin was now almost entirely disregarded as a critic, he nevertheless seems to have attributed some of his temporary ill-fortune to Ruskin's lack of enthusiasm, as does his son, with considerable naivety, in his biography.

Nevertheless, the Millais were steadily rising in the social world. After living for five years in retirement in a modest house next door to Effie's old home, Bowerswell, in 1862 they had moved to a large and elaborate mansion in Cornwall Place, S.W., then at the height of fashion, which, so the punctilious Allingham noted in his diary, had been furnished at a cost of £6,000. By 1868 Millais had become so successful that he was not only able to indulge himself freely in all the whims of the country gentleman, but was even having his elder sons specially coached for Harrow. Thus the fact that Ruskin was considering remarriage, with the possible revival of the old scandals which they hoped had been lived down, must have also engendered in the Millais, who both cared passionately for worldly success, an insidious element of fear. Years ago, when a rumour had gone round that Ruskin contemplated remarriage, Millais had told Hunt that in order that Effie could gain her suit, Ruskin had confessed himself impotent to the Archbishop of Canterbury (a fact for which there is no other evidence, and which, considering that Ruskin was abroad at the time of the suit, and that the evidence that Effie was *virgo intacta* was all that was required to produce the annulment, is scarcely likely to have been true) and asked petulantly how any conscientious clergyman could remarry him. In the same letter he accused Ruskin of being the most wicked man he had ever known in his life, and blamed him "in the coolest spirit" for pursuing a collected course of vileness towards Effie such as few men could be guilty of. Such, then, being the attitude of the Millais family, an attitude

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Millais, *Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*, vol. 1, p. 342.

apparently completely untempered by common sense, or even by discretion, it can better be understood how Mrs. Millais' letters, which Mrs. La Touche evidently showed to Rose, first aroused in the mind of this ill-fated girl, already mentally unstable and wholly ignorant of the physiology and the psychology of sex, morbid thoughts of unnamed sins which she was never later able to eradicate from her mind.

How Ruskin was made aware of Mrs. Millais' accusations, or how Rose now finally addressed him, is not known: but that he was fully cognisant of what had happened is clear enough from his next letter to Mrs. Cowper, to whom he now wrote: "You know, without doubt, by this time that all is over—and perhaps you will not even read this note.

"It is only to say that now, the only thing possible to me is to persevere in all that I have been endeavouring to do. I cannot measure what I may have to endure, nor what those who have loved me (they are many) may suffer for me. But I know that this thing, whatever it is, has been openly against me from the year 1854 till now; and as I had partly lived it down—I believe in the end that through all this evil—what I know there is of good in me will yet have some office upon the earth.

"Of all things hateful, expressions of repentance, on discovered sin—are to me the most so.

"What I was, and what I am—can in no wise be altered now—if repentance *is* in me—it has long ago been past—so far as it can ever cease—but in death.

"There is so much dependent on me that I believe strength will be given me to bear, and to do, what I must.

"If you yet believe enough in me to desire to understand me—in the darkness as in the light—first consider whether if the worst things that men ever had done in their lives were all laid utterly bare, how all would be likely to stand. I know there are multitudes wholly sinless and pure. But I know also—that such as I am—I stand next to these, and above the most. It is no time to say this however—but whatever you care to know of me—you shall.

"You will not mistake the tone of this letter for sullenness or defiance of the world—or for insensitiveness.

"But—from moment to moment I must simply try to live on, and not to think.

"I believe you will never, in the end of life, look back to any part of your own dealings with human creatures more joyfully than on your having been merciful to me just now."<sup>1</sup>

What is clear enough from Ruskin's next letter to Mrs. Cowper, of 2 June, is that the bewildered and distraught girl had poured out her accusations either to Mrs. Cowper or to Ruskin himself, and that

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.



Ruskin, always mercilessly truthful, could find nothing else to accuse himself of than the youthful practice of that habit of which Rousseau has made public confession. "Her words are fearful—I can only imagine one meaning to them—which I will meet at once—come of it what may. Have I not often told you that I was another Rousseau?—except in this—that the end of my life will be the best—has been already—not best only—but redeemed from the evil that was its death. But long before I knew her I was what she and you always have believed me to be: I am and shall be worthy of her. No man living could more purely love—and more intensely honour. She will find me—if she comes to me—all that she has thought. She will save me only from sorrow—from sin I am saved already—though every day that I love her, I deserve her more in all that she conceives of me, or has conceived. But it was not so always. There was that in my early life which is indeed past as the night. I care not what she has seen—the worst of me she shall utterly know—but let her also hear and know the best. There is more depending on her knowing me than her fate or mine. Therefore, now, insist upon knowing what has been shown her.

"Or perhaps at once, even from what I have said—you will tell her to forget me. I could say much against this: but a bad man could say it also, and I will not. But of all thoughts, think but this for me—could a bad man have loved her as I have loved? . . . Tell her—will her to make one effort more to trust—not me—but her own heart. . . . Whatever you do—or judge—I shall never dishonour the love she has given me even by despair—Whatever comes—I will bear it as I may have strength. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But so deep was his anguish that he could not stifle it within his own breast; and four days later he wrote to George MacDonald: "When I last saw you, I told you I would not bring that Cause into any Court.

"But the shadows have deepened—and some must remain deep, forever. I wish you now, and I hope you will yourself think it right, to know the entire scope and interlacing of them."<sup>2</sup> Torn and undecided as he was, Ruskin followed this letter next day with a second: "I wrote to you yesterday under a first impulse—thinking that you ought to know the whole of this matter. But the whole of it involves the history of many years—and of many human creatures, besides my own, and I believe, all I shall ever say now, must be said to all men—at least, it will be only a few words, which any who choose may see—and at *most* it will be a few mere words, which I shall permit those who have cared for me to see. In the meantime tell me, if whatever happens—you can believe unshakenly of me, this that I now write you—using no oath of heaven or earth—but only my human

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 2.6.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 6.6.1868; original with Mr. G. Leon.

Yea. That—from the day I was born upon this earth—through all the days I have yet lived under heaven—I have never yet wilfully and for selfish ends, injured—or purposed injury, to any fellow creature—least of all to those whom I loved. And those whom I have loved—I have loved well. If you can believe this—I will tell you more (not yet, however). If you cannot, you will not desire me to tell you more. ”<sup>1</sup>

It was shortly after this that Ruskin had the conversation with George MacDonald, the salient points of which MacDonald considered so important that many years later, after Ruskin's death, he confided them to his son. In this conversation, Ruskin not only categorically denied the charges of cruelty and immorality which were abroad against him, but stated specifically that there was no truth in the statement that he was incurably impotent, and that the reason he had not consummated his marriage was because he had found that he really did not love Effie, and that under such circumstances it would have been a sin against her for him to do so. What seems clear enough both from this evidence and from several of his previous letters, is that Ruskin never considered himself to have been either functionally or organically impotent. Owing to the fact that, so far as is known, throughout the whole of his life he never had physical connection with a woman, this, of course, could only have been a convinced assumption: on the other hand, since the verdict of “incurable impotence” was given by the divorce court on the evidence that Effie was *virgo intacta*, there is no valid reason whatsoever to consider that this assumption was not perfectly correct.

Meanwhile, Joan Agnew, who was still upon friendly terms with Rose La Touche, had, strangely enough, been invited to stay at Harristown, and had returned so bewildered at the present state of affairs, that Ruskin besought Mrs. Cowper to console her. “It is rather difficult work to keep living just now,” he wrote on 18 June, “and I must not be beaten, for many people's sakes—if I can help it.

“Therefore—I must keep Joanna cheerful as long as I can. You may think it is cowardly of me, I believe it is not—what it is—or what I am—time will assuredly show. For the present, leave Joanna when you see her to-morrow—what poor hope she has. She will tell you that I have none—and what shall I try to do—Decline or show her R.'s letters: you can (truly, without doubt) say that they are harsh, it would only for the present give pain to her. I have told her nothing but that the influence of the M.s has been brought upon R. You can say that it all hurts you too much to be long spoken of—comfort poor little Joanna in any general tender way—such as you know so well, and then let her talk to you of Emily and what else is in her heart.

“I cannot believe that the powers of giving happiness and of

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 7.6.1868, from Denmark Hill; original in Yale University Library.

insight into natural and beautiful things, which are in me, have been given me to be quenched thus. You may wonder at me—but I can *sleep well*—and long. The difficulty is in the waking.

"I shall have things to say—perhaps—some day—not now. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Less than a fortnight after this letter, Mrs. La Touche sent a long letter to Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald, to tell them of the tragic death of her "sweet, fair, gentle Emily", who had died on her way home from Mauritius, and asking for their sympathy in her bereavement. "I can't help being very selfish," she concluded, "and thinking what a daughter and friend she would have been to me. Rose is quite different. She is a wonderful creature, but not *home-like* at all. She is full of genius and full of angularities. Genius, when it is young, and particularly when it is female, is a very prickly flower. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

But after receiving Ruskin's confidences, George MacDonald had decided not to continue relations with Mrs. La Touche; and in a short but sincere note of condolence, Mrs. MacDonald concluded, "We had been feeling all this and a great deal more for you but as friends of Mr. Ruskin and Joan Agnew, we did not think it possible for us to write to you as we used or that you would care to hear from us. . . ." <sup>3</sup>

Some three weeks later (20 July) George MacDonald sent Ruskin a note and enclosed a long letter he had himself written to Mrs. La Touche which, if Ruskin approved, he proposed he should despatch to Harristown. "This is a lovely letter," Ruskin replied the following day, "but I will not send it—for this reason mainly—that it clearly manifests your knowledge of what as far as regards her you must never conceive yourself to know. For I hold that when a woman cares for a man to the point of wholly trusting him, and committing herself by writing—he is bound—however afterwards she may betray *him*, never to betray *her*, and though it is necessary for me to tell you the facts that you may judge for me and counsel me,—yet you must hold them in utter fidelity to her—and when you write it must be with your finger on the ground as though you heard *me* not. Besides when I wrote to you of this first she was by various effort keeping R. and me separate when it was not R.'s will that it should be so: and I wished you to show your sense of her folly and cruelty in this, because I thought you could help me,—but *now*, R. *herself* has left me—past hope—you can help me no longer—you can only add to anger and pain." <sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, about this time Ruskin seems to have not only written to Rose himself, but even to have had a meeting with her, in which she gave him cause for further hope. What is certain is that once she had got over the first shock of the information offered in

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 18.6.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 29.6.1868, from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, 2.7.1868, from "The Retreat"; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished letter, 21.7.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mr. G. Leon.

Mrs. Millais' letters, she refused to accept that Ruskin's influence over her had been for harm. At various dates she made significant little entries in her diary asserting her faith in him: "I think it was Mr. Ruskin's teaching when I was about twelve that first made me take to looking after the poor—" "Mr. Ruskin taught me that which was good." "—The letters Mr. Ruskin wrote me only helped me, and did me no harm, whatever others may say."<sup>1</sup>

On the last week in August 1868, Ruskin went abroad to France, and did not return home until the last week in October. When he did so, however, he must have received a letter from Mrs. Cowper inviting him to go and see her, and enclosing superficial, friendly messages from Mrs. La Touche. But he was now in no mood for conventional messages of any kind. "Thanks always," he replied, "but I shall never pass through Curzon Street more. I remember too well the night last year when I should have waited at your door with the night beggars to see her pass, if I had not feared to hurt her.

"All that you can do for me is to tell me what you think it all means—and whether she will marry anyone else. I know nothing, but that *she* is mad—and the Mother a horror of iniquity—like a Laniace—only with a strange, grotesque Irish ghastliness of grotesque mistake mixed with the wickedness. Fancy Jael sending polite messages to the Mother of Sisera asking how she got on with her embroidery! Her treatment of my cousin has been worse than of me and as treacherous and *more* brutal . . . as being cruelty to a woman—and a child-woman—and not a strong one. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Evidently Mrs. Cowper now reproached him for his harsh words of Mrs. La Touche, for Ruskin's next letter began: "I cannot write of these things, it is all terrible to me—and words are useless. I can neither tell you nor any of them what I would—the more I say the less they understand—I cannot retract anything I wrote of Mrs. La Touche:—Her 'help him to forget us' is to me the Sin of Sins:—hopelessly frightful—unforgivable—base. I do not mean unforgivable in the common way—for when I have once loved any creature, I am true to them to the death—theirs or mine—through whatever decay of soul or body; and whatever she became—however she changed—I change not. But I mean unforgivable in that since she spoke these words (not spoken *first* now) she never could be to me again what she once was. If you only could know how sacredly and devotedly in all that was possible to me—in pure truth to her as wife and mother—I loved her and would love—what would I not have done for her—except leave her as she bade me—to her poor world of shadow and nameless purposeless being. And then she says 'Forget', when this love has become involved also with a deeper still—for which there was no true hindrance but that which she and her husband have now wrought indeed,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. lxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, undated, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

in murdering me slowly—day by day for years—for this—for ever—I shall charge them with and judge them for as in dying—For this is the bitter thing to me—that now I believe, the best that they could grant—and all Rosie's sweet faith and pity came too late. Did Rosie show you those letters? Did *you* too understand them? I have been dazzled into some hope since then: but when I wrote those I had no hope. The last words I spoke to her alone, in final parting, were 'you *know* I have no hope'—she said 'why should you not (have)?' I answered: 'Rosie, you cannot have read those letters carefully—or you would understand why I cannot'—For the letters were—in all the compass of them—just the repeating of one word—'Too late, Rosie love, too late.' They were all but a refusal of the promise she gave and has repeated to you and *now* they blame me for telling her the whole truth of what I had felt for her—My God—would they have had me refuse the child's grace to me—and not tell her I loved her?—not tell her the truth about all that had kept me from understanding her sweet ways and thoughts—till it was too late. If she is a child—and they can turn her as they think away from me—it will ennoble her—not harm her to remember that she *was* so loved—and by me. If she is a woman—much more—in answer to her first word of tenderness to me—had she not the Right to know my heart from the first to the last:—its fullness of love I could not have told—I did not permit myself even to attempt to tell.

"I wrote the enclosed to the Mother—but do not send it him—even if you think it might do some good. I have never lied to my own soul—or to another—and there *is* a vain feigning of gentleness to him in this—which when I try to myself—is not in me—and in truth—the only deep feeling about him in my heart just now is a kind of agony of thankfulness for his *pain*—the deep-drawn breath as of one half slain—thinking back. It is no use telling me what I ought to feel—or ought to try to be to them—I cannot be but what I am—nor say but what I feel. . . .

"Nothing more can be done now—I have much—oh how much—even through all this to thank you for. Those words of hers which you copied for me—if they cannot give me hope—or make it right for me to hope, yet how much do they not bring of strength and sanctification. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But Mrs. Cowper was evidently unwilling to have the situation as it was; and continued to correspond with Rose, as an affectionate and older friend. Early in December, however, she received back one of these letters unopened, together with an offensive letter from Mrs. La Touche, which contained a note to Joan Agnew asking her not to write to Rose again. In justice to Mrs. La Touche, it must be remembered, not only that she had acted partly upon false legal advice, but that during the past year she had lost her favourite daughter,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 4.11.1868, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

had had considerable trouble with her son, and saw Rose threatened with grievous illness. This first letter was so uncontrolled, however, that not only did Mrs. Cowper immediately destroy it; but after a few days Mrs. La Touche sent her two letters of explanation and apology, which, fortunately, have been preserved. "Since I despatched my letter to you on Wednesday," she wrote on 11 December, "I have much regretted what must have appeared to you its discourteous language, and I have felt that not only an explanation, but an apology, was due to you. I therefore ask you to accept the expression of my regret at having written in such a tone; and to bear with me while I tender this explanation.

"After Rose had sent her first letter to Joan last Wednesday, she was seized with one of the attacks of violent pain which the slightest agitation now causes. Her doctor at once saw that she had been subjected to fresh excitement, and said it was vain to hope for any progress as long as there was a possibility of renewed agitation. I wrote as I did by his express orders.

"I would wish you in a measure to understand how extremely painful and agitating to her and to me, it must be to receive any letter that ever so remotely recalls the idea of Mr. Ruskin and the outrage he has offered us.

"I send you a copy of a legal opinion taken on the supposed case of a man divorced on the plea of 'incurable impotency' (such are the terms of the Decree of which I possess a copy, in the Divorce case of *Ruskin v. Ruskin*), and I ask you if it is pardonable that he should have offered marriage to any woman upon earth.

"If he did not know the state of the case, he knew his very peculiar position; and he was bound in honour to ascertain its exact bearing, before he thought of obtaining any woman's affection.

"When he came to Dublin last spring he talked familiarly of Rose in many quarters; bringing, indeed, ignominy upon himself, but much injurious notice and curiosity upon her; and of course the disgusting history of his past has been raised here, and Rose spoken of in connection with it—to the intense indignation of her family and friends. Mr. Ruskin had not even the humanity, knowing as he did Rose's tendency to cerebral disease, to spare her the perplexity and misery of having to hear, over and over again, his appeals and those of his friends, against the right judgment of her natural protectors. While I apologise for the language of my last letter, I must adhere to the decision it expresses. But I would take it as a kindness if you would send me your forgiveness of my first letter, and of anything that may offend you in this, under cover to John La Touche Esq. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The second letter followed a few days later, in answer to Mrs. Cowper's very frank reply to the first. "Bear with me while I say one word more, desiring earnestly to 'speak the truth in love'. I *never*

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 11.12.1868, from Dublin; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

dreamt of returning your love and kindness to my child, for which I feel nothing but gratitude, with 'insult' If you had been my own sister I would have written much as I did, under the pressure of seeing Rosie in severe physical pain, and the doctor's strictest orders, that I would secure her against even the sight of a handwriting that could possibly revive a mental image connected with her past history. The rule we are compelled to enforce is applied to all correspondents, not only you. Some of my own nearest and dearest friends who felt wholly with me in the matter, are now excluded from all communication with her—and other subjects quite unconnected with *that one*, we are compelled to avoid before her. *That one* of course must be forever forbidden.

"Will you, in justice to me—tell Joan I wrote to her? There were none but loving and kind words in the note you did not give her—I think I also have a *little* also to forgive in your imagining I *could* write otherwise to her. I referred her to you for an explanation of the reasons why I could not let Rosie hear from her again—and I only wrote a few loving words such as she would have liked. . . . No one feels more deeply than I do, the wrong that has been done her. She knows that I *never* thought my boy worthy of her, and *he* knows how bitterly ashamed of him I have been, and how grieved, both at what he did and at the way he did it. All I ever said or wrote to Joan was said and written in sincerest affection, and when I said I would gladly hear from her when she was not at D. Hill, I little contemplated the different events and revelations of last summer, or the present state of my poor child's *brain*, which makes it my positive duty, not even myself to receive a letter whose very outside could remind her of the past. I *must* shield her from even reflected pain.

"You mistake me in thinking I have only physical infirmity to lay to Mr. R.'s charge—the truth is far otherwise.

"I am sure he thought himself cured—but that makes no difference—you see by the legal opinion I sent you, that under no circumstances could a second marriage of his be legal—or any children he may have legitimate. Believe me when I assure you I never meant one of the hard sayings in my letter to apply to you. When I said that Rosie's perplexity had been cruelly kept up I meant by him, not by you. I know you always acted in strict honour and fairness—and if I think it would have been better for Rosie to have had no sympathy in a feeling which could not be for her happiness or anyone's, and which was unsanctioned by her parents, still my judgment may be wrong, and you could not but act upon your own.

"Though our correspondence must end here, I cannot but hope that should we ever chance to meet, it may be as friends. And I do entirely regret and retract any expression I have used that seemed unfriendly."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, December 1868; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

By now, many of his friends were urging Ruskin to forget Rose altogether. And on Christmas day, 1869, he wrote to Mrs. John Simon, wife of the brilliant, eloquent and lively surgeon who had been his and his parents' friend now for many years: "It is one of the strangest and greatest difficulties of my present life, that in looking back to the past, every evil has been caused by an almost equal balance of the faults of others and of my own. I am never punished for my own faults or follies but through the faults and follies of others. Nevertheless, it will be justest in you to blame either Fate or me myself, for all that I suffer. My father—my mother—and R. have all done me much harm. They have all done me greater good. And they all three did the best for me they knew how to do. Would you have me, because my father prevented me from saving Turner's work—and because my mother made me effeminate and vain—and because R. has caused the strongest days of my life to pass in (perhaps not unserviceable) pain—abandon the three memories and loves? Or only the most innocent of the three?" But it was not a subject for persuasion or discussion. Ruskin was unable to keep the thought of Rose out of his mind for very long. As Arthur Severn was to complain to him one day, "You're so dreadfully faithful".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.12.1869: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 600.





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## Book VI

### Don Quixote of Denmark Hill

1869-1900

*Don Quixote always affected me throughout with tears, not laughter. It was always throughout, real chivalry to me; and it is precisely because the most touching valour and tenderness are rendered vain by madness, and because, thus vain, they are made a subject of laughter to vulgar and shallow persons, and because all true chivalry is thus by implication accused of madness, and involved in shame, that I call it so deadly. . . .*

RUSKIN: Letter to C. E. Norton.

*. . . The crisis and horror of this present time are that its desire for money, and the fulness of luxury dishonestly attainable by common persons, are gradually making churls of all men; and the nobler passions are not merely disbelieved, but even the conception of them seems ludicrous to the impotent churl mind; so that, to take only so poor an instance of them as my own life—because I have passed it in almsgiving, not in fortune-hunting; because I have laboured always for the honour of others, not my own, and have chosen rather to make men look to Turner and Luini, than to form or exhibit the skill of my own hand; because I have lowered my rents, and assured the comfortable lives of my poor tenants, instead of taking from them all I could force for the roofs they needed; because I love a wood walk better than a London street, and would rather watch a seagull fly than shoot it, and rather hear a thrush sing than eat it; finally, because I never disobeyed my mother, because I have honoured all women with solemn worship, and have been kind even to the unthankful and the evil; therefore the hawks of English art and literature wag their heads at me, and the poor wretch who pawns the dirty linen of his soul daily for a bottle of sour wine and a cigar, talks of the “effeminate sentimentality of Ruskin”.*

RUSKIN: Fors Clavigera, Letter XLI.

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## Chapter I

1. *Minor works: Henry James visits Denmark Hill: Longfellow and Holman Hunt.* 2. *The situation abroad and at home.* 3. *Foundation of the Slade Professorship: Ruskin elected: the Professor.* 4. *The St. Giles Street cleaning: the Hincksey Road making: Mr. Ruskin's Tea Shop.* 5. *Various honours.* 6. *Gifts to the University: endowment of a Drawing Master.* 7. *The Oxford Lectures.*

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I  
IN THIS dark and secret crisis of his life, Ruskin once more sought salvation and forgetfulness in work: and for the next ten years work was to become for him not only a form of dedicated service, but an opiate and a refuge, a harbour and an escape. Indefatigably, deliberately fighting to preserve his sanity, he not only poured out a spate of new lectures upon art, upon geology, upon Greek myths, but sat on committees to consider unemployment, trades unions and strikes, wrote a paper for private circulation upon the General Principles of Employment for the Destitute and Criminal Classes; urged, in the public press, the nationalisation of railways; and threw himself anew into the study of botany and music. Nevertheless, he was still at a loss as to what to consider the centre of gravity of his work. He still felt, as he had felt when he wrote to his mother from Winnington on 25 May, 1868: "Indeed I am quite unable from any present circumstances to judge of what is best for me to do. There is so much misery and error in the world which I see I could have immense power to set various human influences against, by giving up my science and art, and wholly trying to teach peace and justice; and yet my own gifts seem so specially directed towards quiet investigation of beautiful things that I cannot make up my mind, and my writing is as vacillating as my temper."<sup>1</sup> He "planned a cottage life": he lent money to Miss Octavia Hill for her slum reclamation schemes: while an elaborate and beautifully illustrated paper on *Banded and Brecciated Concretion*, written for the *Geological Magazine*, was followed by an introduction for a new edition of Grimm's *Fairy Stories* with illustrations by Cruickshank: and after a holiday in Abbeville, accompanied by William Ward and his gardener Downs, where he made elaborate architectural drawings; and a short visit to C. E. Norton in Paris, where he was introduced to that "quiet and simple gentleman, neither specially frank nor reserved, somewhat grave, very pleasant, not amusing, strangely innocent and calm, caring little for things out of his

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.5.1868: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 550.

own sphere"<sup>1</sup>—Longfellow—he embarked upon those strange and impressive Greek myths, later reprinted as *Queen of the Air*—"the best book I ever wrote", Ruskin called it in a letter to Miss Beever, "the last which I took thorough loving pains with—and the first which I did with full knowledge of sorrow";<sup>2</sup> and his finely illustrated lecture upon the *Flamboyant Architecture of the Valley of the Somme*. He also published *The Cestus of Aglaia*, a series of papers on the practice of art which he had contributed to the *Art Magazine* in 1865.

It is interesting to know the impression that Ruskin made at this period upon the young Henry James, who had heard him lecture with extreme enjoyment upon Greek myths at University College, and to whom he was soon afterwards introduced by the "invaluable" Nortons, who took him to dine at Denmark Hill, where Joan Agnew and Constance Hilliard were also of the party. "Ruskin himself is a very simple matter," James wrote, from Half Moon Street, to his mother on 26 March, 1869. "In face, in manner, in talk, in mind, he is weakness, pure and simple. I use the word, not invidiously, but scientifically. He has the beauties of his defects; but to see him only confirms the impression given by his writing, that he has been scared back by the grim face of reality into the world of unreason and illusion, and that he wanders there without a compass or guide—or any light save the fitful flashes of his beautiful genius. The dinner was very nice and easy, owing in a great manner to Ruskin's two charming young nieces who live with him—one a lovely young Irish girl with a rich virginal brogue—a creature of a truly delightful British maidenly simplicity—and the other a nice Scotch lass who keeps house for him. But I confess, cold blooded villain that I am, that what I most enjoyed was a portrait by Titian—an old doge, a work of transcendent beauty and elegance, such as to give one a new sense of the meaning of art."<sup>3</sup> Strange words, of a man whose whole being was aware of the grim nature of reality, by a novelist who was to turn his back upon one of the greatest subjects of his time—the American Civil War, in order to lose himself in superrefined subtleties concerning too-rich American girls let loose in Edwardian high society.

But Ruskin—who, like most great men, knew himself far better than most other men knew him—was more penetratingly aware of his defects than even the acute Henry James. "In my good nature, I have no merit," he had written to Norton the previous September—"but much weakness and folly. In my genius I am curiously imperfect and broken. The best and strongest part of it could not be explained. And the greatest part of my life—as Life (and not merely as an

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 8.10.1868: *ibid.*, p. 556.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 19, p. lxxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Henry James*, ed. P. Lubbock, vol. 1, pp. 20-1.

investigating or observant energy) has been . . . a series of delights which are gone for ever, and of griefs which remain forever; and my one necessity of strength or of being is to turn away my thoughts from what they refuse to forget. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Restless, tormented, and oppressed once again, he could no longer bear for long the atmosphere at Denmark Hill, and, in 1869, he spent from April until the end of August at Venice and Verona. Bunney was with him, helping him with elaborate architectural drawings, and during the holiday he ran into both Longfellow and Holman Hunt: but nothing could for long alleviate the despondency of his mood. "All these things do not make me happy—nothing will ever do that," he wrote to his mother from Verona, "and I should be afraid if anything could, while the earth is so full of misery."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, despite the fact that his mind was now occupied with grandiose schemes for preventing inundations in Switzerland, among other things, it did not prevent him from considering naively how it might have pleased the English and American public had he been photographed in the beautiful square of Verona, with Longfellow and his flaxen, curly-headed little daughter, or in Venice, standing with Holman Hunt before Tintoret's *Annunciation* in the Scuola di San Rocco. His passionate interest in the idea of preventing Alpine inundations soon became a main preoccupation. "The whole upper valley of the Rhone, sixty miles long and two wide," he wrote to Joan Agnew from Venice on 12 May—"say some seven hundred square miles of land—is a mere hotbed of pestilence (marsh fever), and barren of all food, owing to the ravages of the river. Now I see perfectly well how this could be prevented, and it only needs a little good engineering, and employment of idle hands, to turn the entire valley into a safe and fruitful and happy region.

"Now, nothing in mere farming or gardening would interest me enough to keep my mind engaged on work in the open air; but here is a motive, and an employment, which will last to the end of my days."<sup>3</sup>

"You know I'm going to redeem that Valley of the Rhone," he told Norton in a letter from Verona about a month later. "It's too bad, and can't be endured any longer. I'm going to get civil to the Alpine Club, and show them how to be a club indeed—Hercules's against Hydra. If they won't attend to me, I'll do *one* hillside myself. There shall not one drop of water go down to the Rhone from my hillside unless I choose—and when it does, it shall water pretty things all the way down. And before I die I hope to see a rampart across every lateral valley holding a pure quiet lake full of fish, capable of a six-foot rise at any moment over as much surface as will take the meltings of

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.9.1868: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 17.6.1869: *Works*, vol. 19, p. lv.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 12.5.1869: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 566-7.



XXVII. JOAN RUSKIN AGNEW, LATER MRS ARTHUR SEVERN  
*From the portrait in coloured chalk by Joseph Severn*

**XXVIII. JOHN RUSKIN, 1879**

*By Hubert von Herkomer*

the glaciers above it for a month. And if I don't master the Rhone that way, they shall shut me up in Chillon for the rest of my days, if they like."<sup>1</sup> But Ruskin's mind and energies were soon diverted from this gallant and grandiose project by a general apathy on the part of those who would benefit from his work, and other matters coming more within the scope of his practical abilities. For it was on this holiday, at one of the most fatal points of his whole life, that he received the offer of new work that was to serve as a focal point for the best of his efforts for many years to come; and which gave him just the recognition and the impetus that he needed to concentrate his mind and devote his energies to new and sustained endeavour.

## 2

Ruskin's intense activities of the next fifteen or so years, which were to express themselves chiefly through his professorial chair at Oxford, and that strange and significant collection of letters to the Working Men of Great Britain entitled *Fors Clavigera*, were inevitably stimulated and influenced by the external manifestations of the time—manifestations which, to sensitive and intelligent men, were both ominous and disturbing. The hideous inequalities existing between the classes had compelled Karl Marx to publish, in 1867, his portentous *Capital*. While six years later, even the suave and successful Trollope, who repudiated the opinions of "our philosopher Mr. Carlyle" that "we are all going straight away to darkness and the dogs", and complacently held that "we do not put very much faith in Mr. Carlyle—nor in Mr. Ruskin and his other followers", contemplated a new novel "to the writing of which he was instigated by what he considered to be the profligacy of the age".

Abroad, the Franco-Prussian war gave way to new terrorism and destruction in France. "I went to the Louvre yesterday morning," Lady Eastlake wrote to her sister on 18 April, 1872. "As I turned into the Rue Rivoli the ruin of the Tuileries lay spread before me, the massive mighty walls with their huge windows, all sign of entresols vanished, roof utterly gone, not a beam left, only indestructible iron and richly carved stone, and stacks of high chimneys breaking the sky-line. The whole garden front is a ghastly ruin, the light streaming through it. The long front to the Rue Rivoli is unbroken, but one third of it is roofless, with huge gaping portals. I walked into the Place de Carrousel, which, all smiling as it was with lilacs in full bloom, showed endless signs of havoc in the different pavilions around, evident smashes from shells, carrying away the sculptured architraves of doors and windows—glass entirely out in many, broken panes in others. Scaffoldings were up and repairs going on. Afterwards I drove through the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne to St. Cloud.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 14.6.1869: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 569.



Everywhere the same traces, houses being repaired, young trees planted, a bareness which told the tale. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

At home, in the intoxication of material prosperity, riches continued to be the only true desideratum of existence: and any means by which the unscrupulous could acquire them, legitimate. When, a woman having died in a foul and airless cellar infested by rats, and totally unfit for human habitation, which she rented for 1s. 9d. a week, the coroner at the inquest told the jury that as there were so many of these wretched dwellings about, he hoped that any who were connected with the vestry would take care to represent the case to the proper authorities, and see that the place was not let as a dwelling again, one of the jurors remarked: "Oh, if we are to do that, we might empty half the houses in London; there are thousands more like that and worse;" and urged his colleagues to object to the room being condemned.

Hundreds of gallons of opium were sold weekly for narcotising young babies, so that their mothers could conveniently lay them aside when any more lucrative occupation presented itself—or administer a convenient overdose if desired. While Bright declared in the House of Commons that the adulteration of food was the natural and inevitable result of competition in business, and the ignorance of customers, and that it "is quite impossible that you should have the oversight of the shops of the country by inspectors, and that you should have persons going into shops to buy sugar, pickles, and Cayenne pepper, to get them analyzed, and then raise complaints against shopkeepers, and bring them before the magistrates. If men in their private businesses were to be tracked by Government officers and inspectors every hour of the day, life would not be worth having, and I recommend them to remove to another country, where they would not be subject to such annoyance."

When the ten-hour bill was carried, mill owners were so terrified that their profits might diminish that many of them increased the number of machines each employee was responsible for tending, until the work became so hard that numbers of them used to be carried out fainting. When eventually their health broke down altogether, they were immediately discarded for others.

In the fish market, the "big men" had fish thrown back into the sea in order to keep up prices, while starvation abounded: and any sort of vile hovel, that even an animal must die in, was let out to the afflicted, if only for a few pence.

The new doctrine of the survival of the fittest as an inevitable law of nature created a host of those who, out of sycophancy or self-interest, immediately assumed that it must therefore be a law of God—and prosperous business men were more than ever prepared to listen to the Sermon on the Mount with complacency on Sundays:

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, vol. 2, pp. 225-6.

and with equal complacency act in direct opposition to all its tenets for the rest of the week. In short, provided they could snatch a profit out of it, the wilful destruction of human health and life was a quite natural, if not a God-sanctioned, means of livelihood.

## 3

In 1868 Felix Slade, Proctor in Doctors Commons, and a connoisseur of great wealth and culture, had left a fine collection of glass and pottery, and Japanese art, to the British Museum, and a handsome sum for the endowment of professorships in Fine Art at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London.

At Oxford, although Ruskin's name had immediately sprung into the minds of several of those concerned in the election of the new Professor, an official invitation had nevertheless been sent to the Rev. George Butler, then Headmaster of Liverpool School, asking him to stand for the post. "Verily I think Oxford must be hard put to it to look to me to supply such a need," this gentleman had written in reply to Henry Acland. "Surely Ruskin or Charles Newton or H. Hunt would be better representative of Art than I could hope to be? You are likely to know, and I therefore ask you frankly. Ruskin seems to me of all men most pointed out, *monstratus fatis*, for it, if he will only undertake the labour. But when I saw him in the winter, he told me he had resolved to give up talking and writing and use his hands in preserving from oblivion some of the noble frescoes of Tintoret, which are falling into decay and perishing by other causes. I had some talk at Easter with Richmond, and he agreed with me that Ruskin ought to be urged to stand, and there is no one who could put it before him more forcibly than you."<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Mr. Butler the only one of this opinion. In Oxford there were many of Ruskin's friends who hoped that he could be prevailed upon to stand, among them Dr. Whewell, the Master of Trinity, Robert Willis, Jacksonian Professor of Applied Mathematics, and the Rev. William Kingsley of Sidney Sussex College, with all of whom he had been on intimate terms for many years. But his most ardent and most powerful supporter was Henry Acland, who after over thirty years still had the greatest affection and respect for "curious" Ruskin.

Since his early years at Oxford, when Acland had hoped to get Ruskin to the University in any capacity he could, and the later period when he had eagerly solicited his co-operation over the building of the Oxford Museum, his influence in practical affairs had much increased. In 1858, he had received a command to sleep at Osborne, where he was invited to accept medical charge of the Prince of Wales during his residence at Oxford: and later he was tactfully sounded as to whether he would care to succeed Sir James Clarke as personal

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, A Memoir*, p. 370.

physician to the Queen and the Prince Consort: a position he was compelled to refuse owing to his delicate constitution.

Nevertheless, in 1859 he had accompanied the Prince of Wales on his official visit to Ottawa, whither he went to lay the foundation stone of the new Parliament House in place of the Queen; and since then, on the way to becoming President of the Medical Cabinet in 1870, and to being created a baronet in 1890, he had acquired in Oxford, both in medical and in artistic and literary circles, a position of unique distinction.

Already in 1867 Acland had hoped to persuade Ruskin to become a Curator of the University Galleries; but Ruskin had declared in return that "not in despair, nor in sick sloth, but in a deep though stern hope, and in reserve of what strength was in him, he refused to talk about art, as the English nation was fast, and with furious acceleration, becoming a mob to whom it would soon be impossible to talk about anything".<sup>1</sup> He had, nevertheless, delivered the Rede Lecture at Cambridge in the Senate House in that year; but his interests, which swung almost evenly between art and political economy, had at that time been weighted in the direction of social philosophy.

Dean Liddell, even more commanding in power and presence than ever, who, then, had been sceptical of Ruskin's eligibility, and had acidly enquired whether what he wished in August could be depended upon in November, was now also ardent in Ruskin's favour: and on 10 August, 1869, Ruskin was unanimously elected Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford by Dr. Acland, Dean Liddell, Canon Rawlinson, Professor of Ancient History, in his official capacity as Curator of the University Galleries; the President of University College, London; the President of the Royal Academy, Grote the historian, and Fisher, one of the executors of the will.

Ruskin received the news at Lugano four days later. "Just after breakfast I got a telegram from my cousin George announcing that I am Professor of Art—the first—at the University of Oxford," he wrote to his mother, "which will give me as much pleasure as I can well use, and would have given pleasure to my poor father, and therefore to me—once—and perhaps may yet give some pleasure to—someone who has given me my worst pain."<sup>2</sup> "I hope—quietly and patiently," he continued the next day, "to be of very wide use in this position. I am *but just* ripe for it. I should have committed myself—in some way—had I got it sooner. But now it will enable me to obtain attention, and attention is all that I want to enable me to say what is entirely useful instead of what is merely pretty or entertaining."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 23.9.1867: *Works*, vol. 19, p. xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 14.8.1869: *Works*, vol. 19, p. lviii.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 15.8.1869: *Works*, vol. 19, p. lix.

To Acland, who had always been so sceptical, nay, even contemptuous, of his theories of Political Economy, he wrote on 19 August: ". . . The last ten years have ripened what there was in me of serviceableness, and chastised much of my hasty stubborn and other foolish, or worse, faults—more than all that had happened to me in former life—and though much has been killed and much spoiled of me, what is left is, I believe, just what (if any of me) will be useful at Oxford. I believe you will both be greatly surprised for one thing at the caution with which I shall avoid saying anything with the University authority which may be either questionable by, or offensive to, even persons who know little of my subject, and at the generally quiet tone to which I shall reduce myself in all public duty.

"You may, on the other hand, both be disappointed—partly by actual want of energy in me, partly by carelessness of immediate results. But on the whole, I believe I shall put as much fire into the work as anyone else, and what there is, will be without smoke, or nearly so. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

And to Dean Liddell, even more correct as he was, who had invited him to stay at the Deanery, Ruskin wrote on his return to Denmark Hill: "I hope that in some respects you will find that I shall be able to justify your trust in me more than I have yet given you ground to expect, for I shall scrupulously avoid the expression of any of my own peculiar opinions when I speak by permission of the University, and I shall endeavour to bring whatever I venture to teach, into closer harmony with the system of University as it *used* to be, than its Conservative members would I think at present hope from me. . . . I will answer for its being nothing intemperate or mischievous, though I cannot answer for its being useful, at least for a time."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, mercifully, over the weeks when Rose approached and attained her majority, when the fatal 3 January came to which formerly Ruskin had looked with passionate hope, but which now could hold nothing for him but deepest sorrow and the taste of ashes, he was wholly immersed in the preparation of his first Oxford lectures. From a charmingly characteristic letter written on 22 January to his cousin Joan Agnew, it is evident that he was making a great effort to keep cheerful. ". . . Perhaps, on the whole, it would be well to stop grumbling and mewing all day long. It may be that, a little, that makes the Gods so angry. Let me see what I can say that's nice. First Auntie (his mother) is behaving beautifully, and lets me run ever so often up and down stairs without calling out.

"I've written some nice bits of lecture, and the worst work's over now.

"I can do no end of good—nearly every day—if I like.

"I'm fifty-one, not sixty-one. You know I might have been sixty-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 19.8.1869; *Works*, vol. 20, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 2.9.1869; *Works*, vol. 20, pp. xx-xxi.

one, mightn't I? Some people *are* sixty-one. Poor People. To think of that!

"I'm humpbacked. All humpbacked people are remarkable people—intellectually.

"Though I'm humpbacked, I'm not Richard III.

"I've got such a lovely piece of green flint on the table. Blood-stone.

"I've got £200 odd—at the bank.

"I've got some Turner Drawings—about eighty or ninety, I suppose.

"I've got a Pussie.

"I've got an Isola.

"Now I think a good many people would like to be me.

"Oh me—there's Sunday coming (if I wasn't just going to grumble again!). That delicious Sunday. It's so cheerful and nice, keeping out of church and thinking how many unlucky people are in it."<sup>1</sup>

As a lecturer, indeed, Ruskin had by now attained great popularity and distinction. Even the caustic Lady Eastlake, whom Kegan Paul considered to be a "complete survival of a lady of the last generation, as she sat up at a table with a little slanting writing-desk before her, surrounded by the stiffest furniture and the obsolete pictures of her husband's choice",<sup>2</sup> after hearing him lecture on 4 February at the Royal Institution on *Verona and its Rivers*, could not forbear a grudging note of his success. "The other evening I heard Professor Ruskin's lecture ('havering in his celestial way', Mrs. Oliphant used to call it) at the Royal Institution," she wrote to a friend on 13 February. "He was so much in request that above three hundred persons were turned away from the door. I have little doubt that those consisted mostly of young ladies who were his great supporters within. Before the lecture began he went about benignly among their ranks, and parts of the lecture were graciously suited to their comprehension; some parts were beyond mine, but upon the whole it was a brilliant, ridiculous and interesting performance. I believe afterwards the horses were taken off his carriage, and he was dragged home to Denmark Hill in triumph by his fair hearers."<sup>3</sup>

Four days later, Ruskin delivered his Inaugural Address in the Sheldonian Theatre, where, nearly thirty years ago, he had once recited the poem that had won him the Newdigate Prize. "Whatever happens now," he wrote to his mother immediately afterwards, "I have been permitted by the ordaining Power to begin in Oxford the study of my own art, for others."<sup>4</sup> This lecture had actually been announced to take place in the theatre of the Oxford Museum; but

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 22.1.1870: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> C. Kegan Paul, *Memories* (1899), p. 345.

<sup>3</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 214–15.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 8.2.1870: *Works*, vol. 20, p. xxi.

so huge a crowd had gathered before the doors were opened, that it had to be transferred to the Sheldonian Theatre at the last moment; and even here some of the crowd had to be turned away. After the second lecture, given to "certainly as important an audience as it could have been addressed to, young and old", Henry Acland was discovered by Ruskin in tears, "he was so pleased, and relieved from the fear of my saying anything that would shock people".<sup>1</sup> As usual, however, most of Ruskin's admirers were of the female sex; and these were so numerous and so determined that their presence sometimes made it difficult for undergraduates to gain admittance. For which reason, Ruskin later allowed admittance to his lectures only by tickets previously applied for; and often delivered them twice, first to the University and later to the general public.

Ruskin's Oxford Lectures were indeed memorable performances. Prepared with the utmost care—he once complained that one sentence in *Ariadne Florentina* had cost him as many hours as there were lines in it—they were delivered with a transient and inspired eloquence which seemed to transform the very atmosphere—and with tense, unmoving, upturned faces, his audience would listen enchanted to the magnificent perorations which, even though sometimes vague in meaning, seemed instinct with a significance beyond mortal words.

In a voluminous gown and velvet college cap, the slight, stooping figure of the Professor, with the famous, luxuriant blue stock that matched the colour of his eyes and proved so disagreeable to Matthew Arnold, the homespun tweed trousers, the double-breasted waistcoat, the old-fashioned and badly fitting frock coat, would charge the lecture room with a peculiar fire. The varied, suggestive expressions that played across his sensitive features, the idiosyncratic burr of the slightly rolled R's, the singular voice with its almost theatrical modulations, that now flashed with wit, and now grew strangely sonorous with a haunting plangence, the gestures of the sensitive hands, and the sudden reality which he would throw into his occasional mimicry, as when he was demonstrating the ways of birds, all these imbued his words with a haunting, unforgettable fascination. Quotations from Homer and Chaucer, extracts from his earlier works, these were declaimed with a befitting eloquence: while those 'who listened to his "rhapsodies of exalted thought poured out in rhythmic phrase" were "overwhelmed with the thrilling consciousness of being in the immediate presence, and listening to the spontaneous exercise of creative genius".<sup>2</sup> Sometimes reading simply from his written notes, sometimes apparently speaking quite extempore, Ruskin would begin with a grave dignity, until, fired by some passing thought, he would fling off his gown and his academical restraint, and lift his audience into a strange emotional state wherein thought was fervently

<sup>1</sup> Letter (undated ? February 1870); *Works*, vol. 19, p. xxviii.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Bruce, "Ruskin as University Lecturer", *Century Magazine*, February 1898, p. 594.

charged with feeling, and feeling quivered electrically with thought.

Nor was the Professor wholly innocent of the wiles of the experienced showman. At the beginning of a lecture, solemn attendants would enter bearing pictures which would be ostentatiously placed with their backs facing the audience, to be suddenly held up, face foremost, at the appropriate moment: or with skilful hand and lacerating voice, Ruskin would describe with cunning brush upon the glass of a favourite example, and incisive phrase, the desecration that nineteenth century progress had wrought upon a scene that Turner had commemorated forever with exquisite art. Sometimes, at the end of a lecture, there would be a rush to the front to examine the specimen laid upon his table; and, beguiled by the appreciation of his listeners, the Professor would prolong his lecture by a long informal talk: and sometimes, aware that many of his audience came simply to listen to his famous perorations, he would break off abruptly, and say no more.

But although, after one of the earlier disquisitions, Acland bore to Ruskin the good news that "a very hard and stern man" had been so much moved by his talk that it rendered him speechless for nearly an hour afterwards, the Professor, despite his cautious declarations, was nevertheless soon approached by University friends with grave faces and querulous remonstrances against irrelevant Utopian topics being indiscriminately introduced into dissertations upon art. As the historian, J. R. Green, wrote to a friend, the Vice-Chancellor and Heads of Houses listened plaintively, while an audience of over a thousand and the appropriate number of Dons were electrified by being told that a chalk stream did more for the education of the people than their prim national school with its well-taught doctrine of Baptism and gabbled Catechism, and that as God was in the poorest man's cottage it was advisable that he should be well housed. Nevertheless, as a lecturer Ruskin was wildly popular, and his rooms often filled to overflowing. In December 1877, he wrote to Miss Susan Beever to tell her how he had just given the last of his lectures to a room crowded by six hundred people, two thirds members of the University, with its door wedged open by those who could not get in.

During the first year of his Professorship, when resident at Oxford, Ruskin lived as a member of the Acland family, where he had a quiet room at the back of the house where the view of blank brick wall and soaring chimney pots was so ugly that he was lured into wasting no time by gazing out of the windows. During his second year, however, feeling that he should enter more intimately into University life, he asked a friend whether it would be possible for him to obtain rooms in Corpus: and soon afterwards he was elected to an Honorary Fellowship of the College and offered rooms whose graceful windows overlooked the peaceful garden he so much loved. Here, with Titian's portrait in a corner, Turner's *Bolton Abbey* over the chimney piece

fifteen sketches by Mantegna under the table, to say nothing of a magnificent Turkey carpet upon the floor, and a fine collection of manuscripts, missals, engravings, books and pictures valued for insurance at about thirty thousand pounds, Ruskin set himself to act, between the Titian and the Turkey carpet, the part of a modern and unascetic St. Benedict. And here, in characteristic style, works of art were zealously displayed to as many as cared to view them, discreet dinners were given to cultivated Dons, and "tea and counsel", in opposition to the famous "crumpets and corintheans" of a rival professor, were offered to aspiring undergraduates.

Tea and counsel, however, as Ruskin grew more conversant with the ways of the University, presently gave way to dinner parties of an ostentatious if somewhat Lucullan simplicity, apparently designed to wean his disciples from the champagne and caviare standard at that time so fashionable: and round a glowing fire in his somewhat overcrowded room young princes and poets would gather of an evening for witty and elevating conversation. The Professor was also himself sometimes to be seen dining out with the great: frequenting the table of his pupil and friend, the young Prince of Albany; warmly approving the robust laughter of Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol; being quizzed by Disraeli for surreptitious tea parties with those beautiful daughters of Dean Liddell whom Richmond portrayed so charmingly, and for whom Lewis Carroll first wrote *Alice in Wonderland*; or dining tête-à-tête with that author in order to criticise his drawings. Yet at these Oxford dinner parties Ruskin seldom felt himself entirely free. "It was a most interesting dinner, that last, to me; but a trial in some ways," he wrote to a friend after one of his incursions into University society in 1874. "Things came up which are to me like red rags to a bull, and I couldn't try to toss anybody, first for fear of the Prince, and secondly for fear of getting in the way of some too dexterous matador; which, though of course the poor bull is always in the right, and really the strongest, *does* sometimes happen—and constantly to me, in *talk*."<sup>1</sup>

Gradually he acquired a reputation for eccentricity. He would tempt his fellows into paradoxical conversations for the pleasure of confusing them; lament with heartfelt emotion, were he told that a new railway bridge was being built, over some spot immortalised by Turner; and even rush incontinently from the room if the conversation took a turn that he felt to be offensive. He could be both surprisingly insolent and surprisingly benign. "I rather like it—it reminds me of Venice,"<sup>2</sup> he replied, when a companion remarked upon a smell of decaying vegetation in the Meadows, after flood. But to a gushing lady who one day declared, "Ah, Mr. Ruskin, the first moment that I entered the gallery at Florence I saw at once what you meant when

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 20.2.1874: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> "Ruskin at Corpus", *Pelican Record*, June-July 1894 (quoted *Works*, vol. 20, p. xxxvii).



asserting the supremacy of Botticelli," his caustic reply was: "Did you? And in a minute? It took me twenty years to find that out."<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, a pushing lady asked him how long it would take anyone like herself to paint a plum like one of William Hunt's. "About eight hours a day for forty years, Madam," replied the Professor witheringly.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, in society he was usually distinguished both for his eloquence and his courtesy: and one of his most winning qualities was that he could laugh zestfully at criticism even when it was levelled against himself.

## 4

"I would, in all sober and direct earnestness, advise you, whatever may be the aim, predilection, or necessity of your lives, to resolve upon this one thing at least, that you will enable yourselves daily to do actually with your hands, something that is useful to mankind. To do anything well with your hands, useful or not, to be, even in trifling, *παλαμῆδι δαμῶν* is already much. When we come to examine the art of the Middle Ages, I shall be able to show you that the strongest of all influences of right then brought to bear upon character was the necessity for exquisite manual dexterity in the management of spear and bridle, and in your own experience most of you will be able to recognise the wholesome effect, alike on body and mind, of striving, within proper limits of time, to become either good batsmen or good oarsmen. But the bat and the racer's oar are children's toys. Resolve that you will be men in usefulness, as well as in strength; and you will find that then also, but not till then, you can become men in understanding; and that every fine vision and subtle theorem will present itself to you thenceforward undeceitfully, *ὑποθημούνησιν Ἀθηνῶν*."<sup>3</sup>

So had Ruskin told his audience in his lecture upon *Imagination* in the series known as *Aratra Pentelici*: and that a full life could be achieved only in the cultivation and employment of the faculties of the whole man was perhaps the most important maxim in the whole Ruskinian creed.

Ruskin himself, with the fastidious sense of order inherited from his mother, had always been prone to sweepings and diggings on his own account; and in the early 'seventies found more than one way in which to put one of his most cherished theories into practical operation. The first of these practical experiments was the Street Cleaning at St. Giles.

On his many visits to the British Museum, he was frequently offended by the filthy condition of the public thoroughfares; and he

<sup>1</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7.9.1891.

<sup>2</sup> "A Talk with Sir Arthur Arnold", *Young Man*, February 1896, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Aratra Pentelici: Works*, vol. 20, pp. 264-5.

was anxious to show that it was a comparatively simple matter to keep them in decent order. Thus, having obtained permission from the residents and the local authorities, he hired three street sweepers out of the funds of the St. George's Guild, who were to work for eight hours a day under the supervision of his gardener Downs, to show how "a bit of our London streets could be kept as clean as the deck of a ship".<sup>1</sup> A particularly picturesque rascalion was found to head the band, and for some time Ruskin would himself give solemn demonstrations with the broom as to how to finish neatly into gutters; or drive up in his elegant grey upholstered carriage, with a group of interested friends, to inspect the work and demonstrate how simply the thing could be done. Unfortunately, after a short time, the chief of the band, the picturesque rascalion, an extremely handsome and lively shoe-black picked up in St. Giles, who went by the name of Cheeky and had often posed as an artist's model, suddenly disappeared in order to enlist; and, with a thousand other matters on his hands, Ruskin let the whole thing lapse.

His second experiment, the Hincksey digging experiment at Oxford, even if it achieved but little better practical result, at least aroused an astonished and an astonishing notoriety. When Ruskin became tired of the continual stir in College, he was wont to take quarters at the "Crown and Thistle" at Abingdon, part of the charm of this being that he could enjoy long and leisurely walks into the city of gleaming spires. The favourite of these walks lay by Ferry Hincksey, the hallowed ground of Arnold's Scholar Gipsy, and, noticing one day that a lane leading past a row of cottages had become little better than a rutted morass of dried mud, he at once conceived the plan of urging his disciples amongst the undergraduates to help him transform it into a decent, flower bordered road. In a letter to Acland, whom he persuaded to approach the owner on his behalf for permission to do so, he explained exactly what he hoped to do.

"... In the first place, I want to show my Oxford drawing class my notion of what a country road should be. I am always growling and howling about railways, and I want them to see what I would have instead, beginning with a quiet by-road through villages. Now I don't know in all England a lovelier *site* of road than the lane along the foot of the hills past Ferry Hincksey, and I want Mr. Harcourt's leave to take up the bit of it immediately to the south of the village, and bring it this spring into the prettiest shape I can. I want to level one or two bits where the water lodges, to get the ruts out of the rest, and sow the banks with the wild flowers that ought to grow on them; and this I want to do with delicatest touching, putting no rough workmen on the ground, but keeping all loveliness it has.

"My chief object is to let my pupils feel the pleasures of *useful* muscular work, and especially of the various and amusing work

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 28.12.1871: *Pall Mall Gazette*.

involved in getting a Human Pathway rightly made through a lovely country, and rightly adorned. . . . You don't how how strongly I have urged as the root of all good in any of the arts, from highest to lowest, the founding of all beauty and useful purpose, and the sanctification of useful purpose by grace-giving or decoration."<sup>1</sup> He had, indeed, many times, during his Oxford lectures, castigated the undergraduates for their infatuated devotion to athletics. "You still," he told them, in his lecture on *Idolatry*, "like children of only seven or eight years old, are interested only in bats, balls and oars: nay, including with you the students of Germany and France, it is certain that the general body of modern European youth have their minds occupied more seriously by the sculpture and painting of the bowls of their tobacco pipes, than by all the divinest workmanship and passionate imagination of Greece, Rome, and Mediaeval Christendom."<sup>2</sup> And now he thought he had discovered a way to divert some of the superfluous physical energy to more useful ends.

Permission was eventually granted, and having persuaded some Balliol enthusiasts to participate, the scheme was inaugurated on 24 March, 1874, by a breakfast party in the Common Room at Corpus, with a gathering afterwards in Ruskin's rooms, when he discoursed with persuasive eloquence upon his vision of the ideal state.

"We will do the rough work, and you can make it beautiful when you come back,"<sup>3</sup> Alexander Wedderburn promised him with charming enthusiasm at the end of term—and such was the ardour that Ruskin's words had evoked that as they left the room, a new convert was heard loudly to remark: "Well, if he's mad, it's a pity there are not more lunatics in the world."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, during Ruskin's absence abroad, the work was started, under the supervision of the convenient Downs; and a group of flannel-clad and sometimes bowler-hatted undergraduates, whose numbers included such diverse characters as Oscar Wilde, Andrew Lang, Arnold Toynbee and the future Lord Milner, dug and sweated and generally enjoyed themselves at playing at hard work, much to the amusement of the spectators who regularly foregathered in the fashionable diversion of baiting the diggers.

By the time Ruskin returned, the initial spadework was over. Nevertheless, he himself would sit on his heap with an iron-masked stonebreaker, learning the technicalities of stone breaking in order to advise his "too impetuous" pupils how to break the stones they required instead of the heads of their hammers. Clearly Ruskin enjoyed all this hugely. "I've had a nice breakfast with my diggers," he wrote to Mrs. Severn on 10 November, "and gave the best lecture, everybody says, I ever gave in Oxford. . . . Then I went to

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 28.3.1874: *Works*, vol. 20, pp. xli-xlii.

<sup>2</sup> *Aratra Pentelici*: *Works*, vol. 20, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 20, p. xlii.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

my diggings, and accepted a challenge to use the biggest stone hammer—and used it—with any of them.”<sup>1</sup> “The diggings involve many questions,” he wrote her again on another occasion, “and are in fact a business I should like to take up wholly, with no lectures. Little gutters want bridging, sloughs swallow up stones, banks won’t slope steep enough, and there’s a new problem every day I’m there, and two if I’m not. The great problem is to get stones enough. The second is to get hammers enough. The men go at them so hard they break the hammers sometimes in ten minutes! I’ve broken a good lot of stones to-day—and my own hands—a little.”<sup>2</sup> He even toyed with a plan, when the work should be over, of draining the Oxford fields which were under water all winter—but the project remained a Utopian dream.

In the 1870’s, while Tolstoy was still at work upon *Anna Karenina*, an English gentleman, and an Oxford professor, could not preach the gospel of labour without raising a public outcry: and very soon the jeering spectators grew to be a sneering and facetious mob. In a window at Shrimpton’s in the Broad, there appeared a caricature of the Slade Professor of Fine Art with a pick and shovel as *President of the Amateur Landscape Gardening Society*. Facetious *Platonic Dialogues* appeared in the undergraduate magazines; and elaborate pictures of *Amateur Navvies at Oxford* adorned the smart illustrated weeklies. While Ruskin was abroad, the clamour became so senseless that Acland found himself bound to defend his friend by addressing a long and eloquent letter to *The Times*. “Surely in an age of Liberty and Philanthropy,” he declared, “well meaning men might be allowed to mend the muddy approaches of some humble dwellings of the poor without being held up to the public as persons meet only for the neighbouring Asylum. Is it so, that the principles on which Mr. Ruskin and these youths are acting are insane?”<sup>3</sup>

*Punch*, at any rate did not think so; and published some relevant verses to the effect.

“Acland writes to defend John Ruskin  
 Who an undergraduate team has made,  
 For once, from May-term, morn to dusk, in  
 Hincksey soil to set working spade.  
 So very Utopian! So Quixotic!  
 Such is the euphemistic phrase.  
 Equivalent to idiotic  
 For Athletes guided to useful ways.  
 Pity we have for the man who thinks he  
 Proves Ruskin fool for work like this.  
 Why shouldn’t young Oxford lend hands to Hincksey,  
 Though Doctrinaires may take it amiss?

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10.11.1874: *Works*, vol. 23, pp. lxiii-lxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, undated: *Works*, vol. 23, p. lxiv.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 19.5.1874.

Careless wholly of critics' menace,  
 Scholars of Ruskin, to him be true.  
 The truth he has writ in the Stones of Venice  
 May be taught by the Stones of Hincksey too."<sup>1</sup>

But the new road was very far from being the idyllic perfection that Ruskin had hoped. Indeed, as he was heard to declare himself, it was about the worst road in the three kingdoms, and if there were any level places, these were due to his gardener Downs. A few years later, when the young Henry Newbolt walked out to Cumnor by way of Hincksey "in order to pass along the strip of raised path where Ruskin had instructed his young disciples in the art of roadmaking",<sup>2</sup> he found that although the remains of the abandoned road were still plainly visible, they were not impressive. Nevertheless, together with his written teachings, the making of the Hincksey road was the first experiment in Europe at a new and revolutionary approach to life: and the principles involved, no less significant after three quarters of a century, remain amongst the most important in any practical attempt at a comprehensive and practical social philosophy. From this period onwards, Ruskin himself always devoted much time to useful manual work. Sometimes, when he was a guest at Broadlands, he would set the other members of the party to gather faggots for the poor; and one summer in Italy, Count Zorzi, with whom he was collaborating in order to try to save St. Mark's from direful restoration, found him splitting logs for firewood with the greatest ease and naturalness.

It was at the same time as the Hincksey roadmaking that Ruskin tried another social experiment that was to end in failure—the opening of *Mr. Ruskin's Tea Shop* at 29 Paddington Street. His aim in this was to make it possible for the poor to buy the smallest amounts of tea, coffee or sugar that they required at one time, without having to pay any extra for the subdivision, as was usual in the general run of shops. To this end, he adorned the window of the shop with a magnificent service of old Siena china, and employed Arthur Severn to paint an attractive sign. The business was conducted by two old family retainers—women who had done long service at Denmark Hill; but despite all his good intentions, his prospective customers withheld their patronage.

Finally, after two years, one of the old servants died: and as the shop was by then still losing money, Ruskin surrendered the management of the business to Octavia Hill.

Ruskin's own explanation in *Fors Clavigera* of the failure of his tea shop was disarmingly candid. "The result of this experiment has been my ascertaining that the poor only like to buy their tea where it is brilliantly lighted and eloquently ticketed," he declared: "and

<sup>1</sup> *Punch*, issue of 6.6.1874.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Henry Newbolt, *My World As In My Time*, p. 99.

as I resolutely refuse to compete with my neighbouring tradesmen either in gas or rhetoric, the patient subdivision of my parcels by the two old servants of my mother's, who manage the business for me, hitherto passes little recognised as an advantage by my uncalculating public. Also, steady increase in the consumption of spirits throughout the neighbourhood faster and faster slackens the demand for tea; but I believe none of these circumstances have checked my trade so much as my own procrastination in painting my sign. Owing to that total want of imagination and invention which makes me so impartial and so accurate a writer on subjects of political economy, I could not for months determine whether the said sign should be of a Chinese character, black upon gold; or of a Japanese, blue upon white; or of pleasant English, rose-colour on green; and still less how far legible scale of letters could be compatible, on a board only a foot broad, with lengthy enough elucidation of the peculiar offices of 'Mr. Ruskin's tea-shop'. Meanwhile the business languishes, and the rent and taxes absorb the profits, and something more, after the salary of my good servants has been paid."<sup>1</sup>

## 5

The Slade Professorship was important in Ruskin's career chiefly because it gave him an official prestige and the opportunity to re-nunciate many of his fundamental theories upon art. In the past, when he had expressed his opinions upon certain committees, ill-educated and officious personages had been wont to enquire caustically as to what exactly was his official position in the art world: and the reply that he was teacher of drawing at the Working Men's College had seldom been sufficient to silence their misgivings. But now, he was admittedly one of the greatest art-experts in Europe: and this perhaps had the effect of making some of his pronouncements even more arch-pontifical than before.

He had steadily been acquiring a host of honours during recent years. In 1862, he had been elected an honorary member of the Florentine Academy: and shortly before that, he had been created a member of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest artistic body in the United States. At the end of 1871, he was elected Lord Rector of St. Andrews University, but was later disqualified owing to the fact that it was suddenly discovered that anyone holding a professorship at an English university was, by Scottish law, ineligible for the position. Two years later, however, he was made an honorary member of the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours; and the following year the Institute of British Architects proposed to award him the Gold Medal of the year. But Ruskin, at this time, was particularly gloomy over the vandalisms being effected throughout

<sup>1</sup> *Fori Clavigera*, Letter 48: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 205.

Europe under the name of restoration, for which he felt that the incompetence of professional architects was largely responsible, so that no persuasion on the part of the President of the Institute could prevail upon him to accept.

## 6

It was characteristically impossible for Ruskin to be actively associated with any undertaking without desiring to do all for it that lay in his power; and it was during the first three years of his Professorship that he founded both the Art Collection and the Drawing School that bear his name. He had begun to give specimens of drawings to the University as soon as he had received his appointment; and as time passed his gifts to the University became more and more generous. Dissatisfied with the inadequate space devoted to the existing art classes which were held in association with the Art Department of the South Kensington Museum, for townsmen only, in the University Galleries, he soon wished to inaugurate a proper art school for the undergraduates.

His intention was that the whole of the existing arrangements should be completely reorganised so as to form a fine picture gallery that, with future donations, might become "rich and beautiful in every corner of it",<sup>1</sup> and a series of rooms to be devoted to the use of his University pupils. In addition, the space given to the town classes was to become a grammar school of art that should be interesting even to very young children, filled with prints by great masters, and cases displaying books, seals, casts of coins and other objects of art properly catalogued and illustrated. Moreover, he wished to supersede completely the methods of teaching adopted by the authorities at Kensington, as being simply extended for "the promotion of mechanical, and therefore vile, manufacture". "I should be prepared to furnish myself whatever funds are now furnished by the Kensington Schools," he told Acland; "but I would not allow any prizes of any kind to be contended for, nor any drawings to be prepared for exhibition in any place, in schools under my direction, as I believe the habit of working either for distinction or exhibition to be altogether destructive of the probity and peace of heart necessary for the doing of all good work."<sup>2</sup>

During his serious illness at Matlock in the summer of 1871, one day when Acland was visiting him in his professional capacity, Ruskin suddenly produced a cheque for £5,000 from under his pillow, and, handing it to his friend, naively declared that it was to endow a new Master of Drawing. This gift was presently accepted by Convocation, and gradually Ruskin was able to have matters arranged to his satis-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 14.3.1871: *Works*, vol. 21, p. xx.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxi.

faction. The fitting up of the Drawing School as he wished cost a further three or four hundred pounds; and he not only spent over £2,000 on specimens for it, but gladly robbed his own collections of fine examples, which were arranged round the walls in handsome and expensive mahogany cases ingeniously designed by himself. This collection was finally deeded to the University in 1875, the witnesses being Princess Alice, Prince Leopold and the Grand Duke of Hesse; and the first Trustees, the Vice Chancellor, the present Slade Professor, Prince Leopold, Dean Liddell and Henry Acland.

Thereafter, distinguished visitors to the University were inevitably conducted with befitting pomp to the new Ruskin Drawing School, and Royal Princesses eagerly asked the Professor for loans of drawings for their children. As usual, he was reckless to the point of eccentricity in his gifts, and thought nothing of cutting to pieces a book of magnificent woodcuts for his pupils to study.

Nevertheless, with all his generosity and all his conscientious devotion, the Ruskin Art School was never a conspicuous success. As he himself said acidly some years later, he never succeeded in getting more than three or four undergraduates into his school at one time, even in its palmiest days, of whom three wished to be artists, and ought not, therefore, by rights, to be at Oxford at all—and this too despite the fact that he had hoped to instruct a large number of pupils, and wrote the *Laws of Fesolo* especially to introduce his principles to other schools. This failure to attract numerous pupils was partly the result of his own stern attitude; as those who were not prepared to work seriously were early prohibited from attendance; and pupils unwilling to follow his official methods were denied entrance altogether; and also partly on account of the fact, as again he himself admitted later, that during his Professorship he was looked upon far more as a lively musical box than as a man who knew his science and his business.

But most of all, it was because the study of art was never made a school subject: although in 1874 Ruskin had written to the Vice Chancellor, urging that it should be, and that two readerships should be established, one for painting, and the other for modelling.

Young women, however, filled the places left empty by the undergraduates, in abundance, to benefit wisely, it must be hoped, by the careful instruction that was intended primarily, not to produce professional artists, but to "initiate gentlemen and scholars" into such proficiency and understanding of art as would enable them to relate art and its functions to the general principles of right living, and to appreciate and encourage the work of young artists of talent.



During his Slade Professorship at Oxford, the series of lectures which Ruskin delivered, although they added nothing of material importance to what he had already said in *Modern Painters*, comprehensively explained his mature ideas both on the theory and practice of art. These lectures were published, soon after their delivery, in the volumes entitled *Lectures on Art*, *Aratra Pentelici*, *The Eagle's Nest*, *Ariadne Florentina*, *Love's Meinie*, and *Val d'Arno*. They embraced every subject from *The Relation of Art to Religion* to the *Technics of Metal Engraving*, and form a fine recapitulation of all his aesthetic ideas. Nevertheless, the severe strain imposed upon him by the tragedy of his emotional life was already beginning to affect both mind and behaviour, and eventually the erratic and even dangerous state of his mind could no longer be completely concealed. There was, for example, an embarrassing occasion during the sad November of 1875, when, while trying to explain, during one of his lectures, why the whole dignity of the Psalms was destroyed by an inappropriate setting by Mendelssohn, he suddenly began to dance and recite with his gown flapping madly round his thin legs, and his face charged with a startling expression of excitement: and after this his reputation for eccentricity was more firmly established than ever, and his behaviour sometimes even made the subject of stinging commentaries by his colleagues.

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## Chapter II

1. "*Fors Clavigera*": its personal quality: opinions of Carlyle and Shaw. 2. Genesis of the work: government and misgovernment: worship of money the great illusion: rich and poor: obligations of the classes: luxury—useful and useless: manual labour: usury: the control of the machine: the place of women: the decoration of Barataria: marriage: necessity for co-operation. 3. Growth of Ruskin's social philosophy: the basis of his ideas: true life the unum necessarium: the Guild of St. George: its structure: the village school: theories of education. 4. The Guild in practice: smallness of membership: experiments, successful and unsuccessful: the Sheffield Museum: dependent artists.

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I  
**F**ORS CLAVIGERA, the series of letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain, which Ruskin published monthly (save for certain intervals of illness or distraction) from 1 January, 1871, until December 1884, is one of the strangest, most personal, and most moving productions in English literature. A sort of one-man magazine, it contains, amongst other things, the most charming fragments of autobiography (mostly collected later in *Praeterita*); solid segments of biography; translations of Swiss peasant stories or of French reminiscences; studies in art and botany; elaborate excursions into political economy; a whole theory of social reconstruction upon a practical basis, embroidered with the beguiling conceits of a deliberate Utopian fantasy; elusive and curious promises of instruction in the making of a famous vegetable soup (never, alas, fulfilled); and the most passionate, trenchant and caustic denunciations of the social evils of the day.

Many ingenious sophistries have been produced in order to suggest that *Fors Clavigera*, despite its immense discursiveness, was planned in a deliberately complex fashion, so that, when complete, it would appear as a huge mosaic of intricate, yet foreordained, design. This is only partially true. While *Fors Clavigera* certainly possesses unity in diversity—just as individuality exists in man despite his multifarious personalities—it is a fortuitous, effortless, and haphazard unity based, not upon any deliberate construction, but upon the organic unity of idea that underlay all Ruskin's activities and theories.

In essence, *Fors Clavigera* was Ruskin's last great *catharsis*; each page written directly out of the moment's mood, because self-expression was an utter necessity of his life, and, even had he willed, he no longer had the patience or the power to curb or dam this vast

outpouring of his great and troubled spirit. It is this inevitability, this powerfully personal quality, this half deliberate and half helpless self-exposition, that gives the work both its power and its charm. More intensely autobiographical (because more inwardly and more unconsciously revealing) than *Praeterita*, *Fors Clavigera* is at once the portrait of a great man and the portrait of his age. In style deceptively artless, it reveals alike his every trivial whim and abiding sorrow; in acid humour or noble indignation, it excoriates the follies of a world lost to itself; and in simplest tenderness and sincerity of purpose, foreshadows a millennium which nevertheless could be partially established upon earth.

To the charge of its intensely personal quality, Ruskin very early made his own reply. "I am sincerely obliged by your letter," he wrote to a friend in January 1872, who had observed to him that many people objected to the work for this very reason: "but I think you may very easily and simply silence objections on the score of personality, by merely observing that *Fors Clavigera* is a series of letters, and intended to be—as letters should be—personal. If people want treatises, let them read my *Munera Pulveris*; if lectures, I have written enough, it seems to me. These letters I write for persons who wish to know something of me, and whom I hope to persuade to work with me, and from beginning to end will be full of all sorts of personality."<sup>1</sup> For this we may be extremely grateful, since *Fors Clavigera* reveals more of the real Ruskin than all his other works together. As he himself wrote: "Never allow your own conceit to betray you into that extremest folly of thinking that you can know a great man better than he knows himself. He may not often wear his heart on his sleeve for you; but when he does, depend upon it, he lets you see deep, and see true."

Nevertheless, the charming personal idiosyncrasies scattered about the book, written "imprudently and even incontinently, because I could not at the moment hold my tongue about what vexed or interested me, or returned soothingly to my memory",<sup>2</sup> were sometimes taken so literally by the more ponderous of his readers that eventually he felt himself bound to offer solemn warning that they must of course be carefully sifted from the rest of the book. "For instance, when I say that 'St. Ursula sent me a flower with her love', it means that I myself am in the habit of thinking of the Greek Persephone, the Latin Proserpina, and the Gothic St. Ursula, as of the same living spirit; and so far regulating my conduct by that idea as to dedicate my book on Botany to Proserpina; and to think, when I want to write anything pretty about flowers, how St. Ursula would like it said. And when on the Christmas morning in question, a friend staying in Venice brought me a pot of pinks, 'with St. Ursula's love',

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.1.1872: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 88: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 384.

the said pot of pinks did afterwards greatly help me in my work;—and reprove me afterwards, in its own way, for the failure of it.

"All this effort, or play, of personal imagination is utterly distinct from the teaching of *Fors*, though I thought at the time its confession innocent, without in any wise advising my readers to expect messages from pretty saints, or reprobation from pots of pinks: only being urgent with them to ascertain clearly in their own minds what they *do* expect comfort or reproof from."<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle, who in later years used to mock at the venture, and declare that he found the St. George's Company so absurd that at first he thought it was a joke, was full of enthusiasm in the beginning. "Do you read Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*, which he cheerily tells me gets itself reprinted in America?" he asked Emerson in a letter dated 2 April, 1872. "If you don't, do, I advise you. . . . There is nothing going on among us—as notable to me as these fierce lightning-bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against iniquity, falsity and baseness that Ruskin has, and that every man ought to have. Unhappily he is not a strong man; one might say a weak man rather; and has not the least prudence of management, though if he can hold out for another fifteen years or so, he may produce, even in this way, a great effect. God grant it, say I."<sup>2</sup>

Of its power as a social document, Shaw was to write with characteristic acumen years later: "If you read Sociology, not for information, but for entertainment . . . you will find that the nineteenth century poets and prophets, who denounced the capitalism of their own time, are much more exciting to read than the economists and political writers on political science who worked out the economic theory and political requirements of Socialism. Carlyle's *Past and Present* and *Shooting Niagara*, Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust* and *Fors Clavigera*, William Morris's *News from Nowhere* . . . Dickens' *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* are notable examples; Ruskin in particular leaving all the professed socialists—even Karl Marx, miles behind in force of invective. Lenin's criticisms of modern society seem like the platitudes of a rural Dean in comparison."<sup>3</sup>

And despite the apparently casual manner in which some of the deadliest shafts of *Fors Clavigera* are discharged, Ruskin nevertheless verified the truth of his apparently random detractions with as much care as the cautious Proust verified the names of the wild flowers which he remembered from his childhood walks at Illiers. "Will you please tell me if the present Lord Derby has done anything in the book way?" he enquired of William Cowper-Temple in December

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1885), vol. 2, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup> G. Bernard Shaw, *Everybody's Political What's What*, pp. 179-80.

1873. "It was his father who did the Homer, wasn't it? Has this one written anything? I want to speak of him incidentally in next *Fors*, as an unscholarly blockhead; but I must keep out the unscholarly if he has written anything (though it is true enough, anyhow)."<sup>1</sup>

*Fors Clavigera*—Fate carrying a club—a nail—or a key—as you will. Most subtle, most elusive and allusive, most complex of all subtle and complex Ruskinian titles. Find as many meanings in it as you can, and still more are yet to be found. Ponder upon it as a symbol, and, as with all such pondering, mind and imagination will enter upon paths of widening wonderment and sudden, wider illumination. "The *Fors* is fortune, who is to the Life of Men what Atropos is to their death, Unrepentant,—first represented, I believe, by the Etruscans as fastening a nail into a beam with a hammer (Jael to the Sisera of lost opportunity)," he told the puzzled and enquiring Walter Severn. "My purpose is to show, in the lives of men, how their Fortune appoints things irreversibly, while yet they are accurately rewarded for effort and punished for cowardice and folly."<sup>2</sup> This, indeed, was one of the principal articles of Ruskin's faith, that he so often proclaimed to his friends in private letters and to his assailants in pungent print—that God creates wise and noble laws, and men are punished and rewarded inevitably and exactly to the precise extent in which they flout or follow them. "Of all attainable liberties, then," he wrote in the first number of *Fors*, "be sure first to strive for leave to be useful. Independence you had better cease to talk of, for you are dependent not only on every act of people whom you never heard of, who are living round you, but on every past act of what has been dust for a thousand years."<sup>3</sup>

Yet the aim of *Fors Clavigera*, apart from all its evasive complexities of meaning, was more than that. It was to enshrine and to proclaim a new vision of the social structure, and to create a nucleus of kindred spirits through whom the first efforts towards such a social structure might actively be brought about.

## 2

Although superficially *Fors Clavigera* is merely journalism, both the forces which inspired it and the power in its accomplishment raise it to the highest level of literature in its own *genre*. It is the outcome of a deep emotional revolt; the expression of a deep emotional need. "One cannot live so! One cannot live so!" Tolstoy had cried out when first he had beheld the terrible conditions of poverty in Moscow: and the same indignation and compassion had troubled

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of December 1873, from Brantwood; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Sharp, *The Life and Letters of Joseph Severn* (1893), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 3; *Works*, vol. 27, p. 50.

Ruskin's spirit ever since he too had been aware of the appalling inequalities of life.

"It is not right nor good for you, or for anybody else," he had written in *Time and Tide*, "that I should be tormented by an agony of indignation and compassion, till I am forced to give up peace and pleasure and power; and rush down into the streets and lanes of the city, to do the little that is in the strength of my single hands against their uncleanness and iniquity."<sup>1</sup> "I mean these very letters to close my political work for many a day," he had continued, "and I write them, not in any hope of their being at present listened to, but to disburthen my heart of the witness I have to bear, that I may be free to go back to my garden lawns, and paint birds and flowers there. . . ."<sup>2</sup> But his sensitive and tender heart had denied him still this freedom, and, as he admitted again in the first letter of *Fors*, "I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, when there is any—which is seldom, now-a-days, near London—has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly.

"Therefore, as I have said, I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery. But that I may do my best, I must not be miserable myself any longer; for no man who is wretched in his own heart, and feeble in his own work, can rightly help others."<sup>3</sup>

Time and again he wished himself free of this demanding encumbrance. "I would give anything to be quit of the whole business," he wrote, after five years of it: "and therefore . . . I am certain it is not ambition, nor love of power, nor anything but absolute and mere compassion that drags me on."<sup>4</sup> "If I could find anyone able to carry on the plan instead of me," he wrote on another occasion, "I never should trouble myself about it more; and even now, it is only with extreme effort and chastisement of my indolence that I go on: but, unless I am struck with palsy, I do not seriously doubt my perseverance, until I find somebody able to take up the matter in the same mind, and with a better heart."

His intention, and desire, foremost, was by his influence of thought and deed to help form a body of enlightened opinion. "I neither wish to please nor displease you," he told his readers, "but to provoke you to think; to lead you to think accurately; and help you to form, perhaps, some different opinions from those you have now."<sup>5</sup> And for this reason he desired that the work should be subscribed to regularly by all those who placed any value upon his ideas. "Now it

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 1: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 61: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 6: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 98-99.

has cost me twenty years of thought, and of hard reading, to learn what I have to tell you in these pamphlets," he declared: "and you will find, if you choose to find, it is true; and may prove, if you choose to prove, that it is useful: and I am not in the least minded to compete for your audience with the 'opinions' in your damp journals, morning and evening, the black of them coming off on your fingers, and—beyond all washing—into your brains. It is no affair of mine whether you attend to me or not; but yours wholly; my hand is weary of pen-holding—my heart is sick of thinking; for my own part, I would not write you these pamphlets though you would give me a barrel of beer, instead of two pints, for them:—I write them wholly for your sake; I choose that you shall have them decently printed on cream-coloured paper, and with a margin underneath, which you can write on, if you like. That is also for your sake: it is a proper form of book for any man to have who can keep his books clean; and if he cannot, he has no business with books at all."<sup>1</sup> Therefore he demanded that his readers should pay him the price of "two pots of beer, twelve times in the year",<sup>2</sup> for his advice. In people who would not, or could not pay, he had no interest, and made this clear enough. "My book is meant for no one who cannot reach it. If a man with all the ingenuity of Lancashire in his brains, and breed of Lancashire in his body; with all the steam and coal power of Lancashire to back his ingenuity and muscle; all the press of literary England vomiting the most valuable information at his feet; with all the tenderness of charitable England aiding him in his efforts, and ministering to his needs; with all the liberality of republican Europe rejoicing in his dignities as a man and a brother; and with all the science of enlightened Europe directing his opinions on the subject of the materials of the Sun, and the origin of his species; if, I say, a man so circumstanced, assisted, and informed, living besides in the richest country of the globe, and, from his youth upwards, having been in the habit of 'seeing that he had value for his money', cannot, as the upshot and net result of all, now afford to pay me tenpence a month—or an annual half-sovereign, for my literary labour,—in Heaven's name, let him buy the best reading he can for twopence-halfpenny."<sup>3</sup> In return, he stated his own qualifications for the task. "Certain authoritative conditions of life, of its happiness, and its honour, are therefore stated, in this book, as far as they may be, conclusively and indisputably, at present known. I do not enter into any debates, nor advance any opinions. With what is debateable I am unconcerned; and when I only have opinions about things, I do not talk about them. I attack only what cannot on any possible ground be defended; and state only what I know to be incontrovertibly true. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 38; *Works*, vol. 28, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Letter 43; *Works*, vol. 28, p. 107.

Thus at once the product of an exceptional sensibility and a penetrating mind, *Fors Clavigera* continually contrasts the existing state of things with a desirable state of things, and demonstrates a hypothetical society with an organic structure against the background of a chaotic society without any structure at all. "England at this time," he once observed with intense disgust, "is a mere heap of agonising human maggots, scrambling and sprawling over each other for any manner of rotten eatable thing they can bite off." It was, of course, a conviction that had been growing in him steadily for many years. "I have no hope for any of us," he had written to Ernest Chesneau in 1867, "but in a change in the discipline and framework of all society, which may not come to pass yet, nor perhaps in all our days."<sup>1</sup> His analysis of contemporary society was both acute and stringent. "A 'civilised nation' in modern Europe consists, in broad terms, of (A) a mass of half-taught, discontented, and mostly penniless populace, calling itself the people; of (B) a thing which it calls a government—meaning an apparatus for collecting and spending money; and (C) a small number of capitalists, many of them rogues, and most of them stupid persons, who have no idea of any object of human existence other than money-making, gambling, or champagne-bibbing. A certain quantity of literary men, saying anything they can get paid to say,—of clergymen, saying anything they have been taught to say,—of natural philosophers, saying anything that comes into their heads,—and of nobility, saying nothing at all, combine in disguising the action, and perfecting the disorganisation, of the mass; but with respect to practical business, the civilized nation consists broadly of mob, money-collecting machine, and capitalist."<sup>2</sup>

By general misgovernment, he declared, we had created in Europe a vast populace, and out of Europe an even vaster one, which had lost even the power and conception of reverence; while England herself had become so debased by the lust for wealth, that its very insanity of avarice made it incapable of understanding any thoughtful writing. Its very relief it made either so insulting or so painful to the poor that often they would die rather than accept it: and a nation that was no more than a money-making mob that despised literature, science, art, nature and, most of all, compassion, but concentrated all its soul on pence, could not last. Indeed, in her worship of the golden calf, England had ceased to be a great nation. "A great nation, for instance, does not spend its entire national wits for a couple of months in weighing evidence of a single ruffian's having done a single murder; and for a couple of years see its own children murder each other by their thousands or their tens of thousands a day, considering only what the effect is likely to be on the price of cotton, and caring in no wise to determine which side of battle is in the wrong. Neither does

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from Ruskin to Ernest Chesneau*, ed. T. J. Wise, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 67; *Works*, vol. 28, pp. 639-40.



a great nation send its poor little boys to jail for stealing six walnuts; and allow its bankrupts to steal their hundreds of thousands with a bow."<sup>1</sup>

This illusion and lust of money was at the root of all social evils, steadily corrupting and rotting the whole fabric of society. In Ruskin's view, "it is impossible for a well educated, intellectual or brave man to make money the chief object of his thoughts, just as it is for him to make his dinner the principal object of them. All healthily minded people like making money—ought to like it, and to enjoy the sensation of winning it: but the main object of their lives is not money, but something better than money. . . ."

But besides being the greatest evil and the greatest illusion, money is also the greatest disintegrating factor of modern society, creating the immense, shameful and artificial barrier between rich and poor. Passionately radical in many ways as he was, this is where the Ruskinian view of life differs diametrically from Marxism. With Ruskin, not the conquering of one class by another, but the reconciliation of one class to another, is the fundamental principle of his teaching.

"The distinction between rich and poor rests on two bases. Within its proper limits, on a basis which is lawful and everlastingly necessary, beyond them, on a basis unlawful, and everlastingly corrupting the framework of society. The lawful basis of wealth is, that a man who works should be paid the fair value of his work; and that if he does not choose to spend it to-day, he should have free leave to keep it, and spend it to-morrow. Thus, an industrious man working daily, and laying by daily, attains at last the possession of an accumulated sum of wealth, to which he has absolute right. The idle person who will not work, and the wasteful person who lays nothing by, at the end of the same time will be doubly poor—poor in possession, and dissolute in moral habit; and he will then naturally covet the money which the other has saved. . . . That law is the proper basis of distinction between rich and poor. But there is also a false basis of distinction between rich and poor; namely, the power held over those who are earning wealth by those who already possess it, and only use it to gain more."<sup>2</sup>

For as Ruskin (before Tolstoy) saw quite clearly, no man ever became, or can become, immensely wealthy as a result of either his own labour or economy. All great fortunes (excluding gambling or treasure trove) are founded either upon occupation of land, usury, or taxation of labour. It is this capacity of the rich to acquire without effort the profit of the labours of the poor that causes the life of modern society to resemble a system of slavery at the point of the sword; the only difference being that the levy of blackmail in old

<sup>1</sup> *Sesame and Lilies: Works*, vol. 18, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 411-12.

times was by force, and is now by cozening. Even when wealth has been justly acquired, in existing conditions its use is nearly always abused.

This abuse, however, is not a necessary condition in a social structure based upon clearly defined castes. For although the accidental level of wages is a variable function of the number of provident and idle persons in the world, of the enmity between them as classes, and of the agreement between them as classes, the true and eternal rate of wages depends solely upon a condition of moral enlightenment; and no true political economy, no true social structure, can exist until society recognises that it must be governed by the laws of co-operation rather than the laws of competition.

But, says Ruskin, "I do not mean by co-operation that all the master bakers in a town are to give a share of their profits to the men who go out with the bread, but that the masters are not to try to undersell each other, nor seek each to get the other's business, but are all to form one society, selling to the public under a common law of severe penalty for unjust dealing, and at an established price. I do not mean that all bankers' clerks should be partners in the bank; but that all bankers should be members of a great national body, answerable as a society for all deposits; and that the private business of speculating with other people's money should take another name than that of 'banking'. And, for final instance, I mean by 'co-operation' not only fellowship between trading *firms*, but between trading *nations*; so that it shall no more be thought an advantage for one nation to undersell another; and take its occupation away from it; but that the primal and eternal law of vital commerce shall be of all men understood—namely, that every nation is fitted by its character, and the nature of its territories, for some particular employments or manufactures, and that it is the true interest of every other nation to encourage it in such speciality, and by no means to interfere with it, but in all ways forward and protect its efforts, ceasing all rivalry with it, so soon as it is strong enough to occupy its proper place."<sup>1</sup> Such co-operation not only implies, but necessitates, the willing recognition by each man of his true position in the social structure, and the obligations that this entails. For the true distinction between workers and idlers, as between knaves and honest men, is not a question of class or caste, but runs through the very heart and innermost nature of men of all ranks and in all positions. And the worst of the misunderstandings arising between the two orders come of the unlucky fact that the wise of one class habitually contemplate the foolish of the other.

To Ruskin, the obligations and the duties of the upper classes are clear enough. Theirs it is, with justice and understanding, to maintain law and order, and to restrain punishment and vice: theirs, not only

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, pp. 317-18.

to control all industry for the providence of the foolish, the idle and the weak, but through right education and adept organisation to guide the lower classes, each man in accordance with his capacities, into some industry harmonious to his talents; theirs, as scholars and artists, both to teach the multitude and to provide them with works for their delight. But when the upper class has forgotten its functions, then it is corrupt. It is corrupted when those who ought to be the rulers and guides of the people, forsake their task of painful honourableness, seek their own pleasure and pre-eminence only, and use their power, subtlety, conceded influence, prestige of ancestry and mechanical instrumentality of martial power, to make the lower orders toil for them, and feed them for nothing, and become their living property, goods and chattels, regardless of what misery these serfs may suffer through this insolent domination, or what crime they themselves commit to enforce their will.

The true function of the labourer, on the other hand, is to realise, each man in his own being, that "human work must be done honourably and thoroughly, because we are now Men",<sup>1</sup> and to do the best work that he is able "whether he live or die".<sup>2</sup> To recognise his true function, and to fulfil it, this alone can ensure a man the possibility of a happy life and the fulfilment of his being. Thus "the first duty of every man in the world is to find his true master, and, for his own good, submit to him, and to find his true inferior, and, for that inferior's good, conquer him. The object of a workman's ambition should not be to become a master, but to attain daily more subtle and exemplary skill in his own craft, to save from his wages enough to enrich and complete his home gradually with more delicate and substantial comforts, and to lay by such store as shall be sufficient for the happy maintenance of his old age, and for the starting of his children in a rank of life equal to his own. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, all skilled workmen should pass an official test of efficiency when they come of age, and should then be registered as capable of their profession. Those who do not rise to the necessary standard will then try for something requiring less skill, until they find their level. Once registered, a man will be directed by the guild of his profession to work where his work is needed: for which he should be paid continuously, at a fixed rate, in sickness or in health, from the time of his entering the guild until the hour of his death; so that he shall be tried by no temptations of covetousness, nor made anxious by any doubts or fears for the future."<sup>4</sup>

Ruskin believed all this to be possible, because he believed that human nature is fundamentally generous and kind; that the stupidities of its expression are based chiefly upon the narrowness and blindness

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 76; *Works*, vol. 29, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 86; *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 341-2.

that makes it impervious to all that it cannot immediately see and feel: and that the key to our social errors and cruelty lies in the one phrase—"Si les riches savaient". For him, the fundamental error of most political reformers is that they spend their energies upon trying to explain where they differ from other people: whereas the only method to help matters is to be continually on the alert for any point in which we agree with practical constructive effort; and, whenever we find that anything good or useful can be done, to do it.

For this reason, he considered that, with regard to a government, what is important is not the name that it calls its administration, but the level of understanding and morality that inspires its members. No form of government is of use among bad men; and any form will work in the hands of good: for the essence of government among good men is mainly occupied with the production and recognition of human worth, and the detection and extinction of human unworthiness.

Individually, the man of good will must voluntarily adapt himself to the obligations of the good life. And chief of these is the voluntary participation in manual labour. Ruskin's belief in the necessity of manual labour amongst the upper classes, which was later adopted and elaborated by Tolstoy, was based upon two reasons: firstly that "by the sweat of the brow shall we eat bread is the first and most fundamental law of life",<sup>1</sup> and that no true religious knowledge, or pure morality, can possibly exist among any classes of a nation who do not work with their hands for their bread; and secondly, that on the whole simple manual operations are degrading, and therefore it is the duty of all persons in higher stations of life to diminish their demand for such labour as much as they can by doing all that is possible for themselves. "This ought to be the first lesson of every rich man's political code: 'You are so placed in society—it may be for your misfortune—it must be for your trial—that you are likely to be maintained all your life by the labour of other men. You will have to make shoes for nobody, but someone will have to make a great many for you. You will have to dig ground for nobody, but someone will have to dig through every summer's hot day for you. You will build houses and make clothes for no one, but many a rough hand must knead clay, and many an elbow be crooked to stitch, to keep that body of yours warm and fine. You remember, whatever you and your work may be worth, the less your keep costs, the better. It does not cost money only. It costs degradation. You do not merely employ these people. You also tread upon them. It cannot be helped; you have your place and they have theirs; but see that you tread as lightly as possible, and on as few as possible. What food and clothes, and lodging, you honestly need, for your health and peace, you may righteously take—see that you take the plainest you can serve your-

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 64; *Works*, vol. 28, p. 564.

self with—that you waste or wear nothing vainly—and that you employ no man in furnishing you with any useless luxury.”<sup>1</sup>

“The great necessities of life—food, clothes, and fuel—can be wrested from earth and sea and made fit for human need, only by muscular labour: and no man has right to any of them, until he has done, if he is able, the muscular labour necessary to produce his own share, or else in some other way (as a physician or surgeon, for example) has rendered equal service necessary to life. It saves both labour and time that men should each follow their separate occupations: but it is the duty of a wise government to see that some serviceable occupation has been followed, before men are duly housed and fed.

“Scholars, artists, musicians and writers may be supported by the state, on ‘due pittance’, to instruct or entertain the labourers at, or after, their work; but only provided they have undeniable gifts and have undergone the necessary training to ensure their technical skill.”<sup>2</sup> Ruskin made no pretensions to being delicate with artists and writers as a class. Like Tolstoy, he considered that bad or pseudo-artists were both parasitical and harmful to the cause of art, and he also knew that the very few persons born in each generation whose works were worth seeing and whose words were worth hearing, would somehow manage to persevere in their work despite all difficulties. “Whatever in literature, art, or religion, is done for money, is poisonous itself; and doubly deadly, in preventing the hearing or seeing of the noble literature and art which have been done for love and truth. If people cannot make their bread by honest labour, let them at least make no noise about the streets; but hold their tongues, and hold out their idle hands humbly; and they shall be fed kindly. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

“Not to make unnecessary demands upon others—this is the first lesson of Christian—or human—economy. Demand what you deserve, and you shall be supplied with it, for your good. Demand what you do *not* deserve, and you shall be supplied with something you have not demanded, and which Nature perceives that you deserve, quite to the contrary of your good. But this law forbids no luxury which men are *not* degraded in providing. You may have Paul Veronese to paint your ceiling, but you must not employ a hundred divers to find beads to stitch your sleeves.

“And the degree in which you recognise the difference between these two kinds of services, is precisely what makes the difference between a civilised person and a barbarian.”<sup>4</sup>

The next most important thing for a man who wishes to be a citizen of that world whose laws are established in Heaven, is not to participate in usury of any kind. This was a principle which, as time passed, Ruskin pushed to the most extreme limits; and the one that

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, p. 424.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 67: *Works*, vol. 28, pp. 651–2.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 646.

<sup>4</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, pp. 424–5.

it is most difficult to practise in a society as yet not radically reformed. At first, he was wont to consider that, although all interest is usury, there is a vital difference between exacting the interest of an already contracted debt, and taking part in a business which consists in enabling new ones to be contracted. "As a banker, I derange and corrupt the entire system of the commerce of the country; but as a stock-holder I merely buy the right to tax it annually—which, under present circumstances, I am entirely content to do, just as, if I were a born Highlander, I should contentedly levy black-mail, as long as there was no other way for Highlanders to live, unless I thought that my death would put an end to the system;—always admitting myself a thief, but an outspoken, wholesome, or brave thief; so also, as a stock-holder, I am an outspoken and wholesome usurer;—as a soldier is an outspoken and wholesome murderer."<sup>1</sup>

But later he considered that to take even a modest interest upon invested capital was a transgression of the most insidious kind. If idlers wish to help the state by loaning money for the building of a road—well and good. But if they have loaned, say, £100, they have a right to the return of that £100, and no more. "If they take a farthing more they are usurers. They may take fifty pounds for two years, twenty-five for four, five for twenty, or one for a hundred. But the first farthing they take more than their hundred, be it sooner or later, it is usury."<sup>2</sup> The moment capital is increased by loan, even by so much as a farthing, it is usury, and far worse than theft. Worse because it is obtained "either by deceiving people or distressing them; generally both".<sup>3</sup> Nay, more. Every gain of calculated Increment to the rich is balanced by its mathematical equivalent of Decrement to the poor; thus increasing that division in society upon which all harmful inequality is based.

In a well conducted state usury would be unnecessary, because all vital raw materials, and the tools for working them, would be provided by the government free of cost, on condition that their value was repaid by the workman out of the first profits of his labour.

Similarly, there should be the most stringent governmental control of the machine, so that it should be man's tool, and not his master. The idea that man has been enriched by the machine is an insidious delusion. The machine has merely benefited one class of society at the expense of another, a state of affairs only possible so long as those whom it has thrown out of employment consent to be starved or sent out of the country. "As long as living breath-engines, and their glorious souls and muscles, stand idle in the streets, to dig coal out of pits to drive dead steam-engines, is an absurdity, waste, and wickedness, for which—I am bankrupt in terms of contempt,—and politely

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 80: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 68: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 669.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 670.

finish my paragraph—"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."<sup>1</sup>

Much machinery, and in particular factories which polluted the atmosphere, Ruskin considered to be quite unnecessary. He contended that, rightly harnessed, wind or water power could drive all machinery really necessary, even in England, and steam, or any other mode of heating power, should only be employed in extreme necessity; for such work as speed on main lines of communication, pumping water from great depths, or performing work beyond human strength.

All roads and railroads should belong to the state, but all land should belong to private individuals working it with the maximum efficiency for the good of the community, and standing in a true paternal relationship to the labourers in their service. "All healthy states from the beginning of the world, living on land, are founded on hereditary tenure, and perish when either the lords or peasants sell their estates, much more when they let them out for hire."<sup>2</sup>

The wealth of the state should be held in common, and expressed in a store of food, utilities, and works of true value held in trust for the whole of the people, comprising beautiful architecture, and works of art, and fine museums, libraries, and public buildings. The standard of value would be a given weight or measure of grain, wine, wool, silk, flax, wood and marble; all answered for by the government as of fine and pure quality, variable only within narrow limits. Nevertheless, though Ruskin held that whereas the necessities of life, such as bread, water and lodging, should be tax-free to every man; and that property, rather than income, should be subject to a national tax; he also maintained that the private individual has perfect right to as much property as he can justly acquire.

Emancipation of women was an idea that Ruskin considered merely ludicrous, since their purpose and function in life is so obviously different from man's. "So far from wishing to give the vote to women, I would willingly take it away from most men,"<sup>3</sup> Ruskin once replied to someone who asked his opinion upon the subject; and the fact that the majority of women of the upper classes devoted most of their time to vanity, frivolity and self-indulgence was for him one of the chief contributory causes to the social chaos of the time. To teach, to clothe, to feed and to cherish—these are the chief duties of women; and all his exhortations to young girls were that they should strive, whatever their social position, to fulfil these duties for the benefit of those poorer than themselves. The place of women in the community should be that of the Swiss *paysanne*—and her function the wise care of the family and the careful administration of the home.

With regard to commerce, Ruskin believed that all "payment,

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 82: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 95: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 494.

<sup>3</sup> *Arrows of the Chace*: *Works*, vol. 34, p. 499.

large or small, should be over the counter".<sup>1</sup> Credit merely encourages stupid expenditure, bad debts, and unnecessary anxieties both for him who buys and him who sells. The true price of commodities should be fixed in relation to the cost of food; and they should be sold for the equivalent in value of the healthy maintenance of the producer—such maintenance being calculated in accordance with the requirements of the occupation, and always with a margin over for saving.

Because Ruskin was both artist and aesthete, no less than did Morris in his *News from Nowhere*, he elaborated the vision of his Barataria with the decorations of the poet: and to the traditions of Plato, in the dialogue of *Critias*; of Pindar in his passionate singing of the Fortunate Isles; of Virgil in the Tenth Eclogue; of Bacon, in the *New Atlantis*, or More in the *Utopia*; he added characteristic touches of an individual charm. Every different trade and profession was to have its own dress—suitable, dignified and picturesque; and on state occasions women were to wear their fine golden ornaments and their jewellery of uncut gems. The very coinage was to be no less beautiful than significant; and social life was to be enriched with festivals such as still existed amongst certain European peasantry. A wise and happy people, given principally to agricultural pursuits, enjoying a life of temperate labour enriched with all the innocent luxuries of mind and art—this was the New Jerusalem that Ruskin hoped to see builded in England's green and pleasant land. "It is not more than ten years," he once wrote, "since I saw in a farm-shed near Thun, three handsome youths and three comely girls, all in well-fitting, pretty, and snow-white short and chemisette, threshing corn with a steady shower of timed blows, as skilful in their—cadence, shall we, literally, say?—as the most exquisitely performed music, and as rapid as its swiftest notes. There was no question for any of them, whether they should have their dinner when they had earned it, nor the slightest chance of any of them going in rags through the winter."<sup>2</sup> Such was the type of life that he would inaugurate, instead of groups of dirty and apathetic factory workers unhealthily huddled in mean and sordid slums.

The right for all to a full and expressive life; and above all, the right of those suitable, to marry during the flowering of youth, was the true end he claimed for his political economy. "At present," he wrote in *Time and Tide*, "you keep the best of your maids and bachelors wasting their best days of natural life in painful sacrifice, forbidding them their best help and best reward, and carefully excluding their prudence and tenderness from any offices of parental duty.

"Permission to marry should be the reward held in sight of its youth during the entire latter part of the course of their education;

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 26: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 44: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 132.



and it should be granted as the national attestation that the first portion of their lives had been rightly fulfilled. It should not be attainable without earnest and consistent effort, though put within the reach of all who were willing to make such effort, and the granting of it should be a public testimony to the fact that the youth or maid to whom it was given had lived, within the proper sphere, a modest and virtuous life, and had attained such skill in their proper handicraft, and in arts of household economy, as might give well founded expectations of their being able honourably to maintain and teach their children.

"No girl should receive her permission to marry before her seventeenth birthday, nor any youth before his twenty-first, and it should be a point of somewhat distinguished honour with both sexes to gain their permission in the eighteenth and twenty-second years. This should not hasten marriage. In every year there should be two festivals, on the first of May and at harvest time, at which these permissions should be given to those who had won them during the last half year; and they should be crowned, the maids by the old French title of *Rosières*, and the youths by some rightly derived name from one supposed signification of the word bachelor, and so led in a joyful procession, with music and singing, through the city street or village lane, and the day ended with feasting of the poor. And every bachelor and *rosière* should be entitled to claim if they needed it, according to their position in life, a fixed income from the state, for seven years from the day of their marriage, for the setting up of their homes; and, however rich they might be by inheritance, their income should not be permitted to exceed a given sum, proportioned to their rank, for the seven years following that in which they had obtained their permission to marry, but should accumulate in the trust of the state until the seventh year, when they would be put in possession of their property, and the men become eligible officers of the state. Thus the rich and poor would not be sharply separated at the beginning of life."<sup>1</sup> Thus, also, though each man belonged to a definite and recognised caste, his place in the community would be appreciated and known, in the mutual understanding that all were members of one another.

The one real inconsistency in all Ruskin's social philosophy is his attitude to war. On the one hand, he adjured every workman to be ready to die rather than manufacture bombs and instruments of offence: and very justly he declared that no government occupied in developing to the full the resources of the country would ever voluntarily indulge in war. Nevertheless, he abhorred with his whole being the principle of non-intervention; believing that the righteous cause was easily to be discerned in all contentions, and no true man should withhold his strength in the cause of Justice. What he did

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 17, pp. 420-2.

clearly perceive, however, when all others were blind to the fact, was that war was the direct result of following the policy of international competition rather than international co-operation; and that unless this fundamental error was recognised and changed, there was no alternative but for Europe ultimately to destroy herself in chaos of murder and bloodshed.

## 3

Ruskin's unfolding vision of a new social structure was the most lasting and the most significant feature of his life. From the moment when, as a luxuriously pampered youth, he had become aware of the disagreeable and persistent fact that he could enjoy the elaborate refinements of life only at the expense of others, the meaning of life and the structure of society, and the problem of finding some organic system in which the one should be expressive of the other, had never ceased for long to occupy his mind. It bewildered the readers of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, who had been accustomed to consider building an activity entirely divorced from the higher principles of life; it sounded and resounded in *The Stones of Venice* as a splendid and impressive counterpoint to punctilious, architectural recording: it informed the later volumes of *Modern Painters* with a new spirit hitherto completely alien to art criticism: and, struck out as sparks in his intermediate lectures, it had suddenly blazed forth as a blinding light in *Unto this Last* and *Munera Pulveris*. Thereafter, the evils of contemporary society—their cause and cure, had been a theme to which even his most careful art criticism had been either supplementary or subsidiary. In *Sesame and Lilies*, in *Ethics of the Dust*, in the *Crown of Wild Olive* and in *Time and Tide*, Ruskin had expressed, with more or less coherence, one or another of his social theories. But in *Fors Clavigera*, albeit discursively and with a wanton admixture of bewildering fantasy, he welded the whole of his ideas into an organic whole: difficult to disentangle, it is true: and sometimes not easy to decipher: but nevertheless consistent, appealing and impressive. *Fors Clavigera*, in fact, is Ruskin's ultimate *Testament*, and it is with this realisation that it should be read.

In developing his social philosophy, Ruskin is frequently charged, just as he frequently charged himself, with an elaborate inconsistency. In actual fact, this inconsistency is far more seeming than real. That he called himself, at one moment, a Tory of Tories, and, at another, proclaimed himself to be amongst the most ardent of Radicals, simply meant that his ideas evolved independently of party doctrine, and incorporated all aspects of social theory that he felt to be essentially right and true. What is important in Ruskin's social philosophy, and what gives it value and significance to-day just as much as three

quarters of a century ago, is the fact that it is not an abstraction, but a living organism based upon fundamental principles of a permanent nature. Before you can begin to evolve an adequate social structure, and, still more, before you can begin to evolve theories of an adequate political economy, you must first of all determine how best man can live, and the true function of a nation. Only when you have done this, can you decide rationally what true wealth means for the individual, or what true wealth means for the nation. And Ruskin's answer to both these problems is very clear. True wealth for the individual means one thing alone: his capacity to live a full, awakened life, with all his functions—body, mind and heart—working at their utmost capacity for his own spiritual satisfaction and the service of his fellows. True wealth for the nation can consist only in the production of the maximum quantity of such beings.

Thus true political economy, or the science of life, is that which provides by a deliberate and enlightened organisation, not only for the physical, but for the intellectual and spiritual needs of the whole race. Not that Ruskin believed that every individual man is capable of attaining the same capacity for the true life. In this he differed deliberately from contemporary socialism, and maintained that, men being born essentially unequal, they therefore must have different functions and different needs. But he maintained that each man, no matter how inferior by nature, possessed a certain maximum capacity of emotion, intelligence, and physical well-being; and that it was to ensure this that was the true aim of political economy and of education. Contrary to the ideas of modern communism and fascism, that the function of the individual is to serve the state, in the Ruskinian scheme it is the function of the state to serve the individual.

Having once formulated even the barest outline of his ideas of Social Reform, Ruskin, who, as a writer, possessed all the artist's urge to see his conception take some visual form, set about planning some sort of organisation which would practically further his aims by acting as a leaven that, in the course of time, might leaven the whole lump. Thus he initiated that nobly ludicrous body known as the Guild of St. George—the most magnificent folly, and the most tragic failure in the whole career of the self-styled Don Quixote of Denmark Hill.

The Guild of St. George was to be a band of men of good will, giving, like Ruskin, a tithe of their income, and the best of their energies, to acquiring land, and developing it, in accordance with Ruskin's ideas and ideals. "We will try to take some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful and fruitful. We will have no steam-engines upon it, and no railroads; we will have no untended or unthought-of creatures on it; none wretched, but the sick; none idle, but the dead. We will have no liberty upon it; but instant obedience to known law, and appointed persons: no equality upon

it; but recognition of every betterness that we can find, and reprobation of every worseness. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

This band of Companions, upon enrolment, were to pledge themselves to fulfil a series of rules, both practical and moral, which, although they contained nothing in creed to exclude the faithful of any religion, explicitly stated a moral code in conformity with the strictest tenets of Christianity.

- I. I trust in the Living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible.  
I trust in the kindness of His law, and the goodness of His work.  
And I will strive to love Him, and keep His law, and see His work, while I live.
- II. I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fulness of its mercy, and the joy of its love.  
And I will strive to love my neighbour as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did.
- III. I will labour, with such strength and opportunity as God gives me, for my own daily bread; and all that my hand finds to do, I will do with my might.
- IV. I will not deceive, or cause to be deceived, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor hurt, or cause to be hurt, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor rob, or cause to be robbed, any human being for my gain or pleasure.
- V. I will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty, upon the earth.
- VI. I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness; not in rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.
- VII. I will obey all the laws of my country faithfully; and the orders of its monarch, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its monarch, so far as such laws or commands are consistent with what I suppose to be the law of God; and when they are not, or seem in any wise to need change, I will oppose them loyally and deliberately, not with malicious, concealed, or disorderly violence.
- VIII. And with the same faithfulness, and under the limits of the same obedience, which I render to the laws of my country, and the commands of its rulers, I will obey the laws of the Society called of St. George, into which I am this day received; and the orders of its masters, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its masters, so long as I remain a Companion, called of St. George.<sup>2</sup>

The Companions of St. George were, upon acceptance, to be divided into three classes, in accordance with their circumstances and

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 5, *Works*, vol. 27, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 58: *Works*, vol. 28, pp. 419-20.

means. (1) *Comites Ministrantes*—Companions Servant—composed of a few perfectly independent men willing to devote their main energies, like Ruskin, to the work of the Company, and who would pursue their own private avocations only in subjection to its interests: (2) *Comites Militantes*—Companions Militant—composed of persons actually occupied by agricultural labour, or any other work directed by the master for the fulfilment of the Society's aims, and dependent upon this labour for their livelihood, under the conditions laid down by the Company's statutes, and (3) *Comites Consilii*—Friends of, or in Council: Companions Consular—who would form the majority, and continue as before in their own trades or professions, only giving a tithe of their income, and pledging themselves to live in accordance with the principles of the Guild. The Master, who was to hold supreme authority, like a Venetian Doge, was to hold his office by popular election—Ruskin only, as he said, accepting the position until someone more vigorous and more suitable could be found. Of course, when the Company extended, one single man would not be able to manage all its concerns. But he would then elect men to help him holding the same relationship to himself as the officers of an army do to its general. Beneath these would be the landlords, resident in each district; and then the land agents, tenantry, tradesmen and labourers.

When the Guild contained a sufficient number of *Comites Consilii*, carrying out the Company's laws "to the abolition of many existing interests, and in abrogation of many existing arrangements",<sup>1</sup> then, it was hoped, their influence and example might even ultimately result in a change in the laws of the state. To be honest in all his dealings, and to earn his living with his own hands rather than allowing, and, still less, compelling others to labour for him, these were the first duties of Companionship. The second of these was, however, nevertheless to be considered as an ideal rather than an obligation, since clearly not everyone, even the makeshift Master, Ruskin himself, could, by reason of the condition of life in which he had been brought up, and his previous education, support himself by manual labour alone. Anyone, therefore, could become a Companion of St. George who sincerely did what he could to be of service, and earned his daily bread by his own labour. Even "some forms of intellectual and artistic labour, inconsistent (as a musician's) with other manual labour, are accepted by the Society as useful: provided that they be truly undertaken for the good and help of all; and that the intellectual labourer asks no more pay than any other workman".<sup>2</sup>

Under a strictly aristocratic tradition, land was to be acquired, carefully populated by *Comites Militantes* (who, if they proved suitable, would be given leases of their farms)—cultivated in the

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 67: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 642.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 645.

most prudent and intensive manner: while the labourers were to be fittingly housed, provided with all amenities down to a small library of specially licensed books; their children educated in a becoming manner, their furniture made, where possible, by themselves.

These Companions were to be required to pay a reasonable rent for their lands, but, in contradistinction to general practice, such rents would be lowered instead of raised, in proportion to every improvement made by the tenants themselves, and would be devoted entirely to the benefit of the tenantry or the better cultivation of their land; though the rents of a rich estate might all be spent upon the improvement of a small estate elsewhere, or in the purchase of wild land to be brought under cultivation, or even, if need be, in minerals or vases for the village school.

The village school was, of course, to play a most important part in Ruskin's scheme. To develop right emotions in the child, so that all the energies of its mind should be founded on affection and benevolence; to direct its appreciations so that it should not only naturally do what is right, but enjoy those things which can best give true enjoyment; to cultivate the body so that all its faculties should be developed in balanced strength: this should be the aim and intention of all true education. In general, Ruskin believed that each human being had implanted within him a natural instinct for the education necessary for his right development. "I should like you, for the most part," he once wrote to a young man who had consulted him as to his education, "to do what you enjoy most, in a resolute manner, and to be sure that what you most enjoy doing or learning, Heaven means you to do and learn. Do not try to be great or wise. We none of us can be either—in any degree worth calling so. But try to be happy first, and useful afterwards (no man can be useful who is not first happy)—we can be both of those all our lives, if we will."

Above all, education must be for its own sake and not for the sake of the gratification of any worldly ambition. "There is a strange notion in the mob's mind now-days," he once declared, "that *everybody* can be uppermost; or at least, that a state of general scramble, in which everyone in his turn should come to the top, is a proper Utopian constitution; and that, once give every lad a good education, and he cannot but ride in his carriage (the methods of supplying footmen not being contemplated). And very sternly I say to you—and say from sure knowledge—that a man had better not know how to read and write than receive education on such terms."<sup>1</sup>

The first elements in State Education should be calculated equally for the advantage of every order of person composing the state from the lowest to the highest class, every child should be required by law to undergo a general discipline designed to cultivate the great

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, pp. 396-7.

intellectual qualities of reverence, justice and compassion: to train its mind to think practically in connection with known facts rather than fashionable theories: to learn to do something finely and thoroughly with his hands: and to cultivate his body, by means of healthy exercise, to its highest perfection of strength and beauty. Schools, therefore, should always be situated in fresh country, and have large grounds permanently attached to them.

Instead, "this is what you do", he declared in *Deucalion*, "to thwart alike your child's angel, and his God—you take him out of the woods into the town,—you send him from modest labour to competitive schooling,—you force him out of the fresh air into the dusty bone-house,—you show him the skeleton of the dead monster, and make him pore over its rotten cells and wire-stitched joints, and vile extinct capacities of destruction,—and when he is choked and sickened with useless horror and putrid air, you let him—regretting the waste of time—go out for once to play again by the woodsides; and the first squirrel he sees, he throws a stone at. . . .<sup>1</sup>

"The idea of a general education which is to fit everybody to be Emperor of Russia, and provoke a boy, whatever he is, to want to be something better, and wherever he was born to think it a disgrace to die, is the most entirely and directly diabolic of all the countless stupidities into which the British nation has been of late betrayed by its avarice and irreligion. There are, indeed, certain elements of education which are alike necessary to the inhabitants of every spot of earth. Cleanliness, obedience, the first laws of music, mechanics, and geometry, the primary facts of geography and astronomy, and the outlines of history, should evidently be taught alike to poor and rich, to sailor and shepherd, to labourer and shopboy. But for the rest, the efficiency of any school will be found to increase exactly in the ratio of its direct adaptation to the circumstances of the children it receives; and the quantity of knowledge to be attained in a given time being equal, its value will depend on the possibilities of its instant application. . . .

"The madness of the modern cram and examination system arises principally out of the struggle to get lucrative places; but partly also out of the radical blockheadism of supposing that all men are naturally equal, and can only make their way by elbowing;—the facts being that every child is born with an accurately defined and absolutely limited capacity; that he is naturally (if able at all) able for some thing and unable for others; that no effort and no teaching can add one particle to the granted ounces of his available possibilities."<sup>2</sup>

The best possible education should be open to all, without distinction between master and servant, or scholar and clown: but it should also be enforced upon none, and benevolent Nature should be left to.

<sup>1</sup> *Deucalion: Works*, vol. 26, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 95: *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 495-6.

lead her children, whether men or beasts, to take or leave at their pleasure. The child who desires education will be bettered by it, the child who dislikes it only disgraced.

For reading and writing, Ruskin professed a magnificent indifference which should not be taken too seriously. Fundamentally, he believed that, like arithmetic, they should be taught to a child by his parents at home—or else in special dame schools organised for the purpose. Above all, he maintained that no child should be allowed to read what was not worth reading, or to see what was not worth seeing; but by carefully withdrawing from it all unhealthy distractions, it should acquire the habit of thought, much as he had done himself, by fixing its attention undisturbed upon every visible thing in its domain.

What he intended should be taught in his own schools, primarily, were the elements of music, astronomy, botany and zoology; and all in such wise as should cultivate the child's natural wonder and delight in the visible world.

Geography and geology, accompanied by careful map drawing, he also considered indispensable, his aim being that all knowledge imparted should be of as practical a nature as possible.

No less important in Ruskin's practical system of education was the acquirement of perfect obedience, cleanliness, and the understanding of the nature of honour. "If you ask why you are to be honest, you are, in the question itself, dishonoured. Because you are a man is the only answer: and therefore to make your children capable of honesty is the beginning of education."<sup>1</sup>

Like Tolstoy, Ruskin wanted the child to be brought on by its own momentum of desire and curiosity; and to learn some useful occupation by which, ultimately, it would be able to earn its living, simultaneously with the spontaneous development of all the faculties which would enable it to enter upon an increasingly wider life of serenity and joy.

To accept gratefully what is given is one of the great secrets of life: never learnt, in most cases, because of the insidious desire to obtain some imaginary good which is not given. Thus, not to be destroyed by ambition; not to be beguiled by illusion; but, wise, humble and serene, to bathe joyfully in the world of noble and beautiful impressions, as does the poet and the artist—this is the end for which, in accordance with his capacities, all true education should be intended. Apparently puritan, Ruskin was essentially poet. The things which had brought him the most exquisite joy in life were vivid impressions of the transcendent beauty of the natural world, and their vivid re-creation in the world of art. Not to deny the beauty of the world, therefore, but to accept it with the keenest sensibility and the utmost joy, in gratitude to its Creator and in love to all men,

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Tide: Works*, vol. 17, p. 348.



was the innermost essence of his whole teaching. For it is for the maximum appreciation of true life that man was created; and the whole aim and end of life is to create those conditions in which all who so desire can raise themselves to that state in which the essential meaning and beauty of life can be perceived.

## 4

Once having conceived the idea of the Guild of St. George, Ruskin poured out upon it a wealth both of energy and money. He sold stock, and gave to it a tenth of the fortune he then possessed; persuaded his friends Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and the Rt. Hon. William Cowper-Temple to become Trustees of the funds, and awaited patiently both subscriptions and recruits. In April 1872, he received his first gift from a stranger of £30: after which there was a long pause, and it was not until early in 1878 that the Guild was formally established. Even then, after a year of official life, it had, as Ruskin deplored in his report of the following year, not increased its original membership of thirty-two. Most of his pleas, indeed, like most of his fulminations, fell upon deaf ears; and when, in 1882, in a general statement explaining the nature and purposes of the Guild, he appealed for funds to secure some of the choice manuscripts collected by the Duke of Hamilton, which shortly were to be sold by auction, although the pamphlet was widely circulated, not one penny was received in response. Indeed, so small still was the membership of the Guild, that Ruskin considered that he had been gravely mistaken in expecting rich people to make donation of a tithe of their income, and, since this requirement had evidently had the practical effect of limiting the membership, he now declared himself prepared to accept any person as Companion of the Guild who would comply with its modes of action, consent to its principles, and contribute only one per cent of their incomes, up to ten pounds on incomes of a thousand a year, only; above which sum, no more would be asked.

But even with its pathetically small list of members, Ruskin, who had never been able to keep accounts, lost himself day after day "among spitefully irreconcilable sums, and sorrowfully unintelligible scraps of memoranda". And though he was to be cheered, the following year, by a legacy to the Guild of over £2,500—the highest donation, besides his own, that had been made—this did not alleviate his growing disappointment. As he explained in the Trustees' Report for 1884, by which time the membership still numbered only fifty-six, he had hoped at one time that some of his rich friends, perhaps even some Duke or other large landowner, would have given him enough land to have enabled him to show how, upon the principles of the Guild, land should be managed, but this had not been so;

and his speeches at meetings at the Randolph Hotel at Oxford fell largely upon deaf ears.

He consoled himself therefore by considering statistical investigations that should secure accurate and intimate knowledge of the poor and neglected classes, and the incomes of the rich ones; and by commissioning works for the museum, which was being installed at a cottage belonging to the Guild at Walkley—a far more agreeable occupation for a Master who was usually out drawing something when his advice was required upon a matter of importance, and whose accounts were usually in a state of unparalleled confusion.

It was scarcely surprising that Ruskin should be profoundly disappointed with the practical results of his courageously quixotic Guild of St. George, for apart from the funds furnished by the tenth of his own income, and a few legacies, after several years its additional assets were little more than a few picturesque seaside cottages and a few odd stretches of farmland, much of which was barren and unproductive. Nevertheless, he blamed himself, rather than others, for this apparent failure. "I believe," he had written years before, ". . . that the reason my voice has an uncertain sound, the reason that this design of mine stays unhelpt, and that only a little group of men and women, moved chiefly by personal regard, stand with me in a course so plain and true, is that I have not yet given myself to it wholly, but have halted between good and evil, and sit still at the receipt of custom, and am always looking back from the plough."<sup>1</sup> And now he willingly confessed once more that: "This slackness of growth, as I have often before stated, is more the Master's fault than any one else's, the present Master being a dilatory, dreamy, and—to the much vexation of the more enthusiastic members of the Guild—an extremely patient person; and busying himself at present rather with the things that amuse him in St. George's Museum than with the Guild's wider cares."<sup>2</sup>

A mill on the Isle of Man for the production of homespun thread; a few unproductive farms run by communities that suddenly disintegrated in a manner similar to the Tolstoyan colonies in Russia; a more successful attempt to establish a linen industry on traditional methods; the making of "Greek lace" and the production of art embroidery by a lonely supporter at Keswick; these, like the May Queens of Whitelands College, who received, at their picturesque election each year, a gold brooch of wild roses designed by Burne-Jones and some copies of his books to be distributed amongst their chosen maidens, were all that survived of Ruskin's noble and tragicomic efforts to build Jerusalem in the land of England.

The greatest of the Guild's practical achievements, indeed, was that with which Ruskin was himself most closely associated—the

<sup>1</sup> *Fori Clavigera*, Letter 41: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Fori Clavigera*, Letter 88: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 395.

establishment of the museum at Sheffield which bears his name. Between the magnificent gallery he had designed in his imagination for the Turner Collection at the height of his vigour, and the museum that he was responsible for initiating in his old age, there is a world of difference: nevertheless, first, in the little house at Walkley where Henry Swan, an old friend from the Working Men's College, considered himself rich, as its curator, with £40 a year, where Creswick was first fired to become a sculptor, and a phrenological member of the Guild once told the Master in the midst of some discussion, "Ah, lad, tha's plenty of self-esteem;" and later, at Meersbrook, the property placed at his disposal by the Sheffield Corporation when all his own efforts to raise a subscription to build a museum to his own design had failed, he managed to make a display of a few choice specimens such as he thought fitting in a setting designed, not for scholars and experts, but for ordinary members of the general public. But although the museum was arranged in accordance with his aims, by the time it was opened, he was too broken down in health to be able to see it.

One of Ruskin's chief ideas for the St. George's Museum was that it should be the repository of faithful records and memorials of the beautiful buildings of Europe that were so fast being ruined both by restoration and by decay, and for this reason, for many years, he had employed several promising young artists to make faithful drawings of some of the places that he most loved. T. M. Rooke, Frank Randal, W. Hackstoun, a young Scotsman from Glasgow "redeemed, or rather working out his salvation, for £90 a year", Charles Fairfax Murray, "whose sketches from Carpaccio and Botticelli are amongst the principal treasures we can boast at Oxford and Walkley", a talented young Italian named Angelo Alessandri—"a quite blessed young soul of a Venetian" who, "both in drawing architecture and in copying fresco gave the Guild of St. George the most conscientious and lovely work at prices just sufficient to his maintenance"<sup>1</sup>—Commendatore Boni, master of the work in the Ducal Palace at Venice, who took measurements of special buildings for him at Pisa: these men were despatched to various parts of Europe, to do recording work of a specialised nature for "their affectionate Master" who rewarded their labours with the generous eulogiums of which he was usually so sparing. If his wants were exacting—"Savoy cottages, distant villages and any quantity of work or Byzantine mosaic, of wood, cherry, walnut or pine, that you can get view of", or quick memoranda of old frescoes, to include great views at each end of the market place, with a beautiful arched house, and Juliet's house on the right "carefully drawn loitering towards the piazza"—his solemn congratulations for "most glorious work" were felt to be an ample reward. And, indeed, despite the very low scale at which some of

<sup>1</sup> *The Guild of St. George: Works*, vol. 29, pp. 72-3.

them were paid, his characteristic paternal messages of instructions—"I'll send you to Lago Maggiore as soon as it gets the least cold, and then where you like for the winter; only for goodness' sake keep well; don't sit in draughts, and don't be late out even in French river chills"—never failed to charm the zealous assistants whose work he amiably found "so entirely right and beautiful".

Some of these artists were paid out of the St. George's fund (which consisted chiefly of dividends paid on the tithe of his income which Ruskin had given it), and some were paid out of his own money. Often the accounts got inextricably mixed up; and, having decided that he could do no more for the St. George's Museum, Ruskin would presently add that "he meant in money only", and suddenly make a new splendid donation of some fine minerals.

There can be little doubt that the failure of the Guild of St. George was largely responsible for the attacks of melancholia that afflicted Ruskin's later years: and very often he was assailed with the desire to preach no more. "I . . . am convinced," he said once, "that it is by his personal conduct that any man of ordinary power will do the greatest amount of good that is in him to do; and when I consider the quantity of wise talking which has passed in at one long ear of the world, and out at the other, without making the smallest impression upon its mind, I am sometimes tempted for the rest of my life to try and do what seems to me rational, silently; and to speak no more."<sup>1</sup>

As with Tolstoy, much of Ruskin's teaching was misapplied or misunderstood. Misguided zealots calling themselves disciples went about delivering letters by post: others accused him of taking interest and of using the railway. Ruskin's attitude to such accusations was always one of indulgent tolerance. "I hold bank stock," he once explained, "simply because I suppose it to be safer than any other stock, and I take the interest of it, because though taking interest is, in the abstract, as wrong as war, the entire fabric of society is at present so connected with both usury and war, that it is not possible violently to withdraw, nor wisely to set example of withdrawing, from either evil. I entirely, in the abstract, disapprove of war; yet have the profoundest sympathy with Colonel Yeo and his fusiliers at Alma, and only wish I had been there with them. I have by no means equal sympathy either with bankers or landlords; but am certain that for the present it is better than I receive my dividends as usual, and that Miss Hill should continue to collect my rents in Marylebone."<sup>2</sup> And "What is required of the members of St. George's Company is, not that they should never travel by railroads, nor that they should abjure machinery; but that they should never travel unnecessarily, or in wanton haste; and that they should never do with

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 21: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 364.

a machine what can be done with hands and arms, while hands and arms are idle."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, though of a far less robust nature than Tolstoy, and without Tolstoy's inconvenient gift of reducing all problems to clear, unpractical, basic alternatives, Ruskin did make efforts to practise as far as possible what he preached. But he had acquired so many dependents of one sort and another, all of whom had to be provided for, that he could not disembarass himself of as many of his assets as he would have wished.

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 49: *Works*, vol. 28, p. 248.

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## Chapter III

1. *Illness at Matlock: decline of Mrs. Ruskin: death of old Anne: death of Mrs. Ruskin.* 2. *Brantwood: its furnishing and equipment: family life: first visitors: Patmore and Violet Hunt.*

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I

THE new decade which saw Ruskin elevated to the rank of Professor, was also to inaugurate many other changes in his personal life. 1871, in particular, was a year of particular stress and change. In April, his cousin Joan Agnew married Arthur Severn, son of the Joseph Severn whom Ruskin had first met in Rome during his youth; his old nurse Anne died—that strange old woman who was so formidable a mixture of self-sacrifice, frugality, fidelity, contrariness and ostentatious self-will; then his mother's strength began to fail; and in the summer, during a holiday at Matlock, he himself fell ill of a mysterious malady accompanied by strange dreams that was undoubtedly caused largely by renewed suffering in his still tortuous relations with Rose La Touche, and from which he recovered chiefly owing to the devoted attentions of Acland, Mrs. Cowper-Temple, and Mrs. Severn. "I knew thoroughly how ill I was;" he wrote to Acland soon after his recovery; "I have not been so near the dark gates since I was a child. But I knew also, better than anybody else could, how strong the last fibres and coils of anchor were; and though I clearly recognised the danger, should have been much surprised to have found myself dying."<sup>1</sup>

Scarcely had Ruskin recovered from his own illness, than his mother became seriously worse; and on the 5 December that strangely pathetic and formidable old woman died, as much a martinet at ninety as she had been at thirty-five. There can be little doubt that Ruskin's relations with her for the last few years had proved a great tax upon his powers of patience and endurance. Still fiercely possessive and domineeringly proud, old Mrs. Ruskin had grown steadily more querulous, disagreeable, and self-willed. Whilst exacting from her son all the old subservience, she publicly ridiculed his ideas, abused his friends, and filled the house with continual grumblings and complaints. By now, indeed, contrariness and a deliberate egotism had developed into a sort of mania. One day, for example, she had suddenly asked the startled Georgiana Burne-Jones if she loved God. Feeling that she could only answer in simple truth, Mrs. Burne-Jones replied that she did: whereupon Mrs. Ruskin replied in truculent tones: "I don't;" and delivered a passionate dissertation upon the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 5.8.1871: *Works*, vol. 22, pp. xviii-xix.

arrogance of any creature daring to say she loved God. Punctilious and overbearing, Margaret still continually reprov'd her son in small things as in great. When she found that Ruskin had stood godfather to one of Burne-Jones' children, and had omitted to send the customary gift, she officiously insisted upon offering a knife, fork and spoon at once. Nor had she the least compunction in shouting down the dinner table when company was present that John, as usual, was talking like a fool.

Small wonder that Ruskin found his dutiful evenings spent at home a source of weariness and melancholy. "I would have asked you to spend your birthday here," he had written to Burne-Jones from Denmark Hill the previous year, "but I am so inconceivably more than usually dull and stupid—not depressed, but lifeless and dreamy, that I can't but think you will both be happier by yourselves. Besides, Sunday's always wretched here—from old idle habits—and the servants 'keep it' by going out larking, and are piously vicious if one asks them to do anything."<sup>1</sup>

By this time, the house at Denmark Hill was filled with old family servants. It was one of old Mrs. Ruskin's good points that none who had been faithful in service was ever discharged; but found, as she grew old and infirm, such nominal duties as should keep her occupied without being any strain upon her years. "And what does *she* do?" asked one too bold guest of an aged waiting woman who was hovering dimly. "Why, she puts out the dessert," Mrs. Ruskin answered, magnificently crushing.<sup>2</sup> But Ruskin, always dutifully subservient in her presence, had nevertheless at last emancipated himself from her dominion: a process that he had long since realised to be both inevitable and necessary. "The 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' has to be spoken, I believe, to all parents, some day or other," he wrote to a friend later. "They accept it when it is a matter of income, scarcely ever as one of principle."<sup>3</sup>

And now, at last, this dutiful, passionate, self-willed, stubborn and inconveniently pious old woman was dying. "My Mother has been merely asleep—speaking sometimes in the sleep—these last three weeks,"<sup>4</sup> he told Harrison. "It is not to be called paralysis, nor apoplexy—it is numbness and weakness of all faculty—declining to the grave. Very woeful: and the worst possible death for me to see," he continued as she lay dying, a few days before. "She reminds me altogether of what she was when she taught me the Sermon on the Mount, and two or three more things not useless to me: and her hand lies on her breast as prettily as if Mino of Fesole had cut it, and it is very pretty, though so thin," Ruskin wrote to Acland a few days later, with her body in the unlidded coffin at his side. "The last

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> W. G. Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin* (1900), p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Letter undated (? 1876): *Works*, vol. 37, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Letter undated: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 43.

days were very cruel. I am glad no members of the Metaphysical saw them, of the Huxley side, lest they should be afraid to speak without hurting me. For, indeed, the sinking of all back to the bleak Mechanism was difficult to bear the sight of. Absolute unconsciousness at last, with aspect of restless pain."<sup>1</sup>

"I fancied I knew pretty well how I should feel at the end," he wrote to Harrison by the same post. "But I am much more surprised at the new look of things in the twilight than I was after the sun had set for my father."<sup>2</sup>

But in reply to a letter of condolence from George MacDonald, he unburdened himself more freely of his bitter grief. "I am much worse off than you think. I never loved my mother. I was deeply grateful to her—imperfectly dutiful to her—but there was no real intercourse possible between us, for many and many a day—far gone.

"All that I had of love was given to one person—and thrown to the kites and crows—now I must get on without any, as well as I can, and without hope of any. But I am thankful that (as far as I know) I have kept my wits—and eyes that see well enough—now that they have done crying."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he was to miss her in the future more deeply than he had imagined. "When I lost my mistress, the girl for whom I wrote *Sesame and Lilies*, I had no more—nor have ever had since, nor shall have—any joy in exertion," he wrote twelve years later to Ernest Chesneau; "but the loss of my mother took from me the power of Rest."<sup>4</sup>

So Margaret Ruskin, who expected "not to be near her husband, not to be so high in heaven, but content if she might only see him",<sup>5</sup> was laid at last beside John James; and her son, dutiful and grateful to the last, inscribed upon their common monument:

Here  
Beside my father's body  
I have laid  
My mother's:  
Nor was dearer earth  
Nor purer life  
Recorded in heaven.<sup>6</sup>

As a more practical tribute to her memory, he cleansed and made beautiful a spring of water not far distant from her Croydon home, where he erected a memorial tablet: "In obedience to the Giver of Life, of the brooks and fruits that feed it, of the peace that ends it, may this Well be kept sacred for the service of men, flocks and flowers, and be by kindness called Margaret's Well. This pool was beautified

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 6.12.1871: *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter, 21.12.1871; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 3.4.1883: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 445.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin*, p. 283.

<sup>6</sup> *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxiv.



and endowed by John Ruskin, Esq., M.A., LL.D.”<sup>1</sup> But the flowers he planted were trampled down, and the water he had purified was once more fouled, by action of the local authorities: and eventually his tablet was removed and his purpose forgotten.

In her short and simple will, Mrs. Ruskin had left all that she possessed to her son.

## 2

The death of his mother inaugurated a new and final period in Ruskin's life—the period of Brantwood. As we have already seen, since his earliest manhood he had longed for a place that would be completely his own: but every attempt to set himself up in a little house, whether in Wales, in Switzerland, in Ireland, or in England, had somehow been frustrated.

But in 1871, just after he had recovered from his illness at Matlock, he had suddenly heard of a small property for sale in his beloved Lake country, near the lone crags of Coniston that he had sung with precocious nostalgia as a boy. This was the house of Linton, the poet and engraver, beautifully situated on the eastern side of Coniston Water, about ten miles from Ambleside, which stood upon what had once been the territory of the Cistercian Monks of Furness Abbey. As soon as Ruskin saw the place, he was enchanted. Although the house was dismal and dilapidated to the extent of being completely useless, the view was magnificent—“anything so lovely he hadn't seen since he was at Lago Maggiore”,<sup>2</sup> he told his cousin: and bought the little property, with its sixteen acres, for £1,500 without delay.

“Anything so splendid in the way of golden and blue birds as the pheasant I put up at my own wicket-gate to the moors out of my own heather, was never seen . . .” he wrote to Mrs. Severn again on 14 September. “There certainly is a special fate in my getting this house. The man from whom I buy it—Linton—wanted to found a ‘republic’, printed a certain number of the *Republic* like my *Fors Clavigera*! and his printing press is still in one of the outhouses, and ‘God and the People’ scratched deep in the whitewash outside. . . . For the house itself! Well, there is a house, certainly, and it has rooms in it, but I believe in reality nearly as much will have to be done as if it were a shell of bricks and mortar.”<sup>3</sup>

“It is a bit of steep hillside, facing west, commanding from the brow of it all Coniston Lake and the mass of hills of South Cumberland,” he told Carlyle. “The slope is half copse, half moor and rock—a pretty field beneath, less steep—a white two-storeyed cottage, and a bank of turf in front of it; then a narrow mountain road, and on the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 13.9.1871: *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 14.9.1871: *Works*, vol. 22, pp. xxi-xxii.

other side of that—Naboth's vineyard—my neighbour's field to the water's edge."<sup>1</sup>

It was hither—when the place had been lavishly rebuilt and furnished—that Ruskin moved such possessions as he had not already taken to Oxford, after his mother's death. Denmark Hill was sold, and for a *pied-à-terre* in London, he henceforward used the nursery in the old house at Herne Hill, where Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Severn were now established. "There is no fear of my sucking the orange at Coniston," he told C. E. Norton a few days later. "There is none to suck. I have simply light and air, instead of darkness and smoke,—and ground in which flowers will grow. All I look for is light and peace—those, unless by some strange chance of evil, are sure to me. What little pleasure I still look for will be in Italy—mixed with bitter pain—but still intense in its way. In Cumberland I merely breathe and rest."<sup>2</sup>

Brantwood—a moderate sized, cream-washed house half covered with creeper—was not, as might have been imagined from the elaborate plans Ruskin had made when he contemplated building at Mornex, decorated or furnished by Morris & Co. The heavy, well-made, unbeautiful mahogany furniture of his parents was transported to Coniston and, apart from a paper made specially for his bedroom, taken from a greyish white damask sleeve with a dark pattern on it, which he had set Ward to copy from a picture by Mario Marziale, the decoration and upholstery were given into the hands of a well-known and expensive firm of house furnishers who lacked both taste and distinction. The result was not unlike that at Denmark Hill. Everything was of the best quality, but patterns were ostentatious and colours often severely crude. If ever this was remarked upon, Ruskin defended himself by saying that he had no need of artificial beauties, since the perennial loveliness of the views from his window was all that his spirit required. With his usual candour, Ruskin narrated to the readers of *Fors* the vast expenditure all these renovations ultimately cost him. "The house at Brantwood, a mere shed of rotten timber and loose stone, had to be furnished, and repaired. For old acquaintance' sake, I went to my father's upholsterer in London (instead of the country Coniston one, as I ought), and had five pounds charged me for a footstool; the repairs also proving worse than complete rebuilding; and the moving one's chattels from London, no small matter. I got myself at last settled at my tea-table, one summer evening, with my view of the lake—for a net four thousand pounds all told. I afterwards built a lodge nearly as big as the house, for a married servant, and cut and terraced a kitchen garden out of the 'steep wood'—another two thousand transforming themselves thus into 'utilities embodied in material objects'; but these latter opera-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 37, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, p. 56.

tions, under my own immediate direction, turning out approvable by neighbours, and, I imagine, not unprofitable as investment.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the house was lavishly filled with many of the beautiful things that Ruskin had collected since his youth. The specially printed, florid wall paper in his own bedroom was almost completely obscured by his beloved Turner water-colours, hung so closely in tiers that the frames almost touched. His long and low-ceiled study, with its windows commanding a noble view of the lake, was cluttered up with treasures. Over the fireplace opposite his massive writing desk hung another favourite Turner—the Lake of Geneva: and the walls, where not hung with pictures, were fitted with bookcases with cabinets below to house his valuable library and his fine collections of illuminated manuscripts, missals and letters, which now included the manuscript of *The Fortunes of Nigel*, many of Scott’s letters, and beautifully bound and printed rare editions of such diverse classics as Plato and Fielding. In special trays lined with velvet were stored his much valued minerals.

In the hall, there were two imposing figures by Burne-Jones: while drawing-room and dining-room housed the magnificent Doge Gritti, by Titian; two Tintoretos; a fine portrait of Raphael; the famous self-portraits of the young Reynolds and Turner, and the Northcote portraits of his father and mother and himself as a child. Of course there were pets. “I’ve got a cat, but she scratches, and I can’t keep her tail out of the candles,” Ruskin complained to Mrs. Cowper-Temple early in 1873. “And I’ve got a dog—a shepherd’s—who won’t do anything wrong—but it’s so horribly moral, it’s more dull than I am myself.”<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin was still passionately fond of sailing, but as yet Brantwood possessed no harbour, so he was very soon engaged in constructing a breakwater to defend his boats from storm; presently Collingwood and Wedderburn, who had been invited to Brantwood to help him with some literary work, were also amusing themselves by helping to build the necessary harbour, which, alas, had to be finished eventually by professional hands. A small boat, christened *The Jumping Jenny*, was designed by the Master himself; and duly launched with befitting ceremony, a wreath of daffodils being placed about her bows, and some verses sung specially written by Ruskin for the occasion.

From the first moment that he had stood in the old ruined house, looking down upon the sun-coruscated lake, and wondering if ever he would know the joy of having Rose standing there in silent appreciation at his side, he had been enchanted by the beauty and remoteness of the place; and this enchantment never left him. With his intense and sensitive love of nature, it was inevitable that Ruskin

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 76: *Works*, vol. 29, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 17.2.1873: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 62.

should tend his grounds with unremitting care. Paths were cut in the woods, streams were diverted, orchards planned, and masses of narcissi were planted, to remind him of Vevey.

Very soon after he was installed, Ruskin began to enjoy the pleasures of a host in a way that he had never been able to do before; and several friends were invited to share with him the measured and scholarly routine of his life. Mr. and Mrs. Severn—D. Ma. as he called her now—were soon installed with their first child, and over breakfast, served in the drawing-room which commanded another fine view of the lake, with strawberries and cream from the farm across the hill, Ruskin would read aloud from one of his favourite novels by Scott, or from some manuscript of his own, written that morning, before his guests were up. Still rather naively conscious of being a good master, the servants enjoyed a distinguished place in these scholarly hospitalities. If a guest praised a dish at dinner, solemn compliments were conveyed by the butler to the cook. Were it a flower that aroused admiration, the gardener was congratulated. And it was quite the established thing for the parlourmaid to enter to announce a particularly striking sunset. Indeed, David, the coachman, Crawley, Ruskin's valet, and "Downsie-Powsie", the gardener, were as established and familiar figures at Brantwood until the end of their working days as were Mrs. Severn and her children, who, until the end of his life, were as daughter and grandsons and granddaughters to him: and eventually the whole household used to be assembled daily for the Master to conduct family prayers.

Amongst the earlier visitors to Brantwood were his old friends, Lord and Lady Mount Temple, Coventry Patmore, and Venice and Violet, the two little daughters of William Hunt. Until the end of his life, Ruskin was to have many friendships with little girls, in whose naivety and affection he found an ever-increasing solace for the lack of responsiveness that had so often met his love elsewhere.

But much as he loved them, Ruskin could not always fully enter into the feelings of children. When he took them nutting, he carried an axe to chop down branches so that they could fill their bags with ease, never realising that much of the charm of the adventure would have lain in difficulties overcome by athletic stratagem. When they played hide-and-seek, he chose such conspicuous places to hide in that there had to be a special arrangement not to find him too quickly. Nevertheless, he was intensely sensitive to children's feelings. Once, when he was taking Violet Hunt for a walk, she suddenly stopped and asked: "Mr. Ruskin, before we start, do tell me if we shall be asked to come here again next Saturday." "Certainly. But why should you think of that now? Sufficient for the day is the happiness thereof." "No," replied his little guest of eleven. "I can be so much happier to-day if I know it is not the last—if I know I am going to be happy another day—if this day is only a piece of happiness, not the whole

of it.”<sup>1</sup> “Poor child,” the Professor replied. But the sympathy in his voice remained with his little guest for many years.

He made new friends at this time, among his neighbours: chief amongst them Miss Susan Beever, an elderly lady who lived nearby, full of interests and a keen horticulturalist despite her chronic invalidism.

In time, the slight, slender, stooping figure of the Professor, in his grey frock coat and ample blue stock, was to become one of the familiar and beloved sights of the neighbourhood. For, as he approached old age, Ruskin had acquired the capacity of endearing himself to those who came casually into contact with him to an even greater degree than he had possessed it in his youth. One of the monks at Assisi, with whom he stayed during his visit there in 1874, used to keep Ruskin's letters to him wrapped up in his handkerchief, and treasured them like the relics of a saint; while all over France custodians remembered him and spoke of him to visitors with the most enthusiastic words. Many years later, when he visited Chartres, the young Proust returned to give the sacristan a special tip because “he had known Ruskin”.

Possibly this was on account of his steadily increasing humility. For the young man who at twenty-three had dogmatized with the intrepidity of a dictator, now fully realised that “at fifty-six he still had everything to learn”.

Nevertheless, as the years passed, visitors to Brantwood would record, often with a singular lack of perspicacity and humour, every gesture and every word which their host uttered. Probably Ruskin was a little flattered by it all, and also secretly amused. Once when, in conversation with Collingwood, he had become unusually confidential, his secretary remarked, “Never mind, I'm not Boswell taking notes.”

“I think,” said Ruskin unexpectedly, “you might do worse.” And doubtless there are many who agree.

<sup>1</sup> Violet Hunt, “Ruskin as a Guide in Youth”, *Westminster Gazette*, issue of 3.2.1900.

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## Chapter IV

1. *The unhappiness of Rose La Touche: she passes Ruskin in the street: Ruskin's despair: Rose's farewell.* 2. *Reconciliation: a new separation.* 3. *Rose writes of her sorrows to George MacDonald: George MacDonald and Mrs. Cowper-Temple try to effect a new reconciliation: Rose accuses Ruskin of nameless sins: Ruskin's indignation and bewilderment: he decides to return home: George MacDonald explains the situation: Rose waits for Ruskin's arrival: her apprehension: meeting at the Retreat: disappointment and sudden consolation.* 4. *Disappointment again: intense bitterness: resolution to work.*

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I  
ALTHOUGH Rose could not forget Ruskin, nor Ruskin, Rose, after the correspondence between Mrs. Cowper and Mrs. La Touche of December 1868, no further communication of any kind passed between them for many months. Then during the autumn of the following year, Rose, who was obviously unhappy, had written, on her own initiative, to Mrs. Cowper: ". . . It is impossible to help writing to you. I try not to, and think how foolish it must be, but I cannot help thinking of you and longing to talk to you, and it is such a relief writing to you. . . . Indeed I am thinking of you constantly for I miss you dreadfully. Mama grows harder to me, and I shut up—for what I *do* say she misunderstands, and it seems as if I had to learn *not* to speak, but to bear quietly living so utterly alone. I should not mind her disagreeing with me in everything, if she only seemed to love me—but I don't want to grow hard—only it seems as if I *must*, or else feel it all and be so unhappy.

"I had a walk with Papa after luncheon, chiefly lecturing me (kindly you know) about 'the dangers of trusting to my own judgment', and a little about not trying to make it happier and more loving at home and 'looking for sympathy and affection out of it'—he meant it kindly, but it was hard, for indeed I *do* try. . . . He does not know that if it was ever so much harder at home, and I could get double the love out of it, I would never leave it unless I thought it right. And indeed I want to make it happier for them too, and think *that* is quite part of the work for me at present. . . .

"You won't be angry with me for writing these—and you must not answer them for I shan't ever think you forget . . . don't see much of Mama now. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

It is not known whether many other letters passed between Rose and Mrs. Cowper at this time, but apparently the girl came to London

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, undated; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

shortly afterwards, and the two women met; with the result that Mrs. Cowper, who never seems to have taken as an insuperable difficulty the legal obstacles referred to by Mrs. La Touche, once more, in the charity of her affectionate heart, wrote to Ruskin to send him a photograph of his beloved, and to tell him that she thought that there were still some grounds for hope. "It was very sweet of you to write to me to-day," Ruskin replied on 8 October. "I have this little view of Rosie beside me, and have been thinking thirty years away, and I am glad to have this day for my own little calendar of festas and days of memory that no one else knows.

"You need not fear hurting me—but you cannot comfort or help me—by anything you can now send. Words and omens—and promises and prayers—have failed me too often to leave me any care now for any of them—were it otherwise—all is now too late—I can never be to her—what I was to her once—nor she what she was to me. . . . Nothing she could now do or give—could efface the pain she has given, or restore to either of us what we have lost.

"Yet do not be unhappy about me. In many ways this pain has fitted me for my work, and in the work itself—if I am spared to do any part of it—I shall have a true and increasing happiness of a certain hard kind. You say you will love me more—I don't think you will—for I shall be more and more separate from you in the material and mechanical thoughts which are all I have to depend on in my work—but I am not afraid of your leaving me—now—helpless as R. did, and this is great good to me. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

On 7 January, four days after her twenty-first birthday—that so much longed-for day on which for years Ruskin had hoped to have his answer—Ruskin passed Rose accidentally in the street, and she refused to speak to him. From this moment he began to identify himself with the Dante legend, and Rose with Beatrice. Indeed, the effect that this long period of emotional stress was now clearly beginning to have upon his mind is apparent from the letter which he wrote to Robert Horn on 12 January. "Three years ago a brother and sister were engaged. One to my good little cousin Joanna. The other to me. Joanna's engagement was sudden, but to her very vital and precious. Mine was after service of seven years. . . . To-day Joanna's lover is being married far away. *She* is with me, her favourite sister just dead, and last Friday about twelve o'clock at noon my mistress passed me and would not speak. The way she was taken from me was singularly horrible. Her mother was jealous of her with me, and having sought to break the engagement by every other means in her power, and from the love she bore me changed into an incarnate Hate, brought the child, who was utterly holy and pure, into such communication with all those who speak or know any evil of me, as to cause her love to perish in the bitterest pain. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter, 8.10.1869, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

A few days later, however, in one of her mysterious changes of mood, Rose sent him some books, including one of his own heavily overscored with notes, and Ruskin, having received them, wrote to Mrs. Cowper: "This is only to say that I am a little better to-day, and not going to be beaten, for the moment, though I will not keep up this struggle for long—for I find it is telling upon me, more than I knew. If she really does not care for me any more at all—I cannot go on—the whole thing will have been so horrible that every word I tried to say about God or right would choke me. . . . Do you know I think almost it would help me just a little if you would not write to her any more. I am so jealous of you—it takes away your own power of being kind to me. If I were to send you these books she sent me could you send them back to her—and the prayer book? . . . Do you know I am not quite sure the devil *is* beaten by beating. I am rather fancying that sometimes he is to be beaten by yielding. That is to say suppose I were able to bring what you would call truth and victory out of this—Then you would all say it was all right—and saintly pink personages would just do the same to other people—Whereas supposing I were beaten—and—suppose—after giving some few opening words at Oxford, to show what I had meant and hoped to do—I confessed that it had become impossible for me now, and ceased troubling—Then people would understand at once that wrong *was* wrong—which is the sum of all I have got to say with all my labour—and my mind is getting so mixed up now of desire for revenge—and a kind of hatred which the love is changing into that my whole existence is becoming distorted and I don't well understand anything, besides a shame and anger at myself—increasing day by day—which checks me and lowers me too fatally. But don't be afraid for me at the moment. I know I am very wrong in feeling so wretched—for—on the 2nd June—a year and a half ago I had not even the hope of being useful any more to any one—and should have thought the day had come back in brightness if I had certainty of but half the power for good that I have now.

"But the truth is—when she sent me my book all over marked with her writing—I am afraid—I got into a state of deadly hope again—though I thought I didn't. It is more the not knowing what to do that makes me so tremulous now. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

The Rose obsession, indeed, was steadily deepening in his mind until it interrupted and interfered with all his work. "It is not nearly what it should have been," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper on 5 February, of his most recent Oxford lecture, "owing partly to the east wind and fog—which kept me from walking and all the best thoughts come to me when I'm in the open air—but chiefly because of that unlucky child—the three weeks' work after that had all to be done again—they were so stupid with the pain. I have not got over it—nor shall—but it

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 9.1.1870, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.



has got itself into a lump now—which I can throw into a corner out of the way at work times instead of mixing itself all through me. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

During the next fortnight, however, Ruskin found some opportunity of sending a letter to the girl, in which he reproached her bitterly, not only for her conduct to himself, but for her conduct to his cousin; and to this Rose sent an answer addressed to Mrs. Cowper-Temple, asking her to give it to Ruskin only if she wished. Mrs. Cowper-Temple decided not to do so, and fortunately the letter has been preserved.

“I do not think it is much use my saying how bitterly untrue some of your letter is. One thing I am sure—it is utterly impossible for us to judge each other—you me, or I you. Certainly I *cannot* know you, or your circumstances and feelings, and every word you write shows that you have not the faintest idea of mine.

“I am influenced and must be influenced, and have had to be obedient and I have never known or had a chance of knowing for the last three years *what* was kind or right.

“I haven’t the least faith in my own judgment, but I *can* only do what seems to me least wrong. I have never in any degree been cruel to Joan. The love of my Parents is the only love that is a real possession to me now, that I have a *right* to, and that I dare not lose or wound bitterly—more bitterly than you can imagine, by doing things you speak of as though they were simple *Christian* duties (such as writing to your Joan).

“You have many things to give you joy and strength, your work, your friends, your powers of thought and appreciation—you did not lose much by losing my friendship—you are unjust to me, terribly unjust. Can you not see that it needs a greater faith in me to be silent (when I long to write, but fear it may be wrong of me) and leave you to God and believe that the love I give you is not utterly vain, not wholly disbelieved by you?—(who have no Trust) than to try and step back (to the misery of my Parents) into a position I can never hold with you again. For however sweet it might be, I am not the little thing I was.

“But I believe all writing is powerless to explain. I *do not* think I talk with angels. I believe in God’s grace bringing good out of our sorrowful human tangles; but for myself I have been utterly wearied and perplexed, and have no single guide even to teach or help me.

“Only now I am beginning to get back to my parents’ confidence—of you I never speak. I have lost *φίλη* as a friend, though I know I have her love.

“Your inscription would have been most unjust. Who has so great a right to say God bless you, as the one who most desires it for you.

“I can’t ‘bless’ you by words or deeds . . . thoughts you don’t believe in; what you think you care for in me I don’t know, if you

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 5.2.1870, from Denmark Hill; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

indeed believe me to be cowardly, cruel and unchristian—More—your letter implies more.

“Good-bye. Go on and prosper. You may ask God’s blessing for me, for I need it—more than kind and true words from you, which I believe you meant to write. I cannot, it is vain to say it, ‘rule’ your life in any way. And yet

“This is my prayer, if Thou dost send  
Blessing or pain to him and me,  
Give me the pain—but bless my friend,  
Whom I have loved eternally.’”<sup>1</sup>

## 2

Evidently it was very wise of Mrs. Cowper-Temple to withhold the letter; for a few weeks later Rose and Ruskin were able to meet; and immediately all superficial misunderstandings fell away and each succumbed anew and with joy to the miraculous charm of the other. “You have every right to know that the great darkness has ended for me,” Ruskin wrote to MacDonald on 11 March. “R. has come back to me—and nothing now can take her from me—in heart—though if fate will have it so I may never see her—but she is mine—now. No one must know this, however—as it would cause her infinite grief and pain with her people—but she is in peace now—and I also—which is much. It is all too late—all vain and full of shadows. But not full of *bitterness* any more—and if my strength is spared to me—I can work now, perhaps none the worse in the sadness—or the dream, of the strange—distant—moonlight—than others could in the sun.”<sup>2</sup>

But now, as always in this passionate and precarious relationship, there was not to be peace for Ruskin for very long.

Shortly after he had finished his Oxford lectures, he went off, as usual, to Italy by way of France and Switzerland; but scarcely had he returned than he was involved once more in the most painful transactions. By now, moreover, he seems to have been fully aware of the abnormal nature of the attachment. For on the night of his return home, in a letter to Norton in which he deplored the Franco-Prussian War, he said: “I have been endeavouring this morning to define the limits of insanity. My experience is not yet wide enough. I have been entirely insane, as far as I know, only about Turner and Rose; and I’m tired; and have made out nothing satisfactory.”<sup>3</sup> The evidence as to what exactly happened at this time is of so scanty a

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 21.2.1870; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 11.3.1870, from Denmark Hill; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 29.7.1870: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 13.

nature that it can only be conjectured that Ruskin was still hoping to arrange a marriage, and that Mrs. La Touche, who now knew of his reconciliation with her daughter, was resorting to the most desperate measures to secure another complete separation between them. This evidence, in fact, is a fragment of a letter of Ruskin to a woman friend, copied in the handwriting of George MacDonald. Greville MacDonald believed the fragment to have been extracted by his father from a letter written either to Mrs. Cowper-Temple or to Mrs. MacDonald and submitted to him for his perusal. But as the MacDonald and Cowper-Temple letters were carefully preserved, and the original of this one is not among them, the probability is that it was sent to Rose's aunt, whom Ruskin was trying to persuade to intercede for him with her parents. This letter, which must have been shown later to Rose, is not only a confession of the worst sexual sin of which Ruskin was guilty, but is clear proof of the falsehood of the diverse calumnies which were continually being levelled at him. The words in square brackets are probably remarks inserted by George MacDonald.

"The only hope that the mother, who is now literally *mad* with rage, has of separating the child from me, is by making her believe me not only a villain, but a singular and monstrous form of one. It is at least impossible for her to make her daughter believe evil enough of me to prevent her enquiring farther—and if she succeeds in doing this, the child will assuredly never have another happy hour. She might leave me, peacefully—holding me yet in honour; to leave me in evil thoughts of me would destroy every faculty of her life [quite true].

"You are, I believe, a woman of the world, and will not suppose it probable that any man's life or nature should be wholly spotless. If you have read history rightly—you know that the men who are most capable of love, are also among the most liable to fault.

"How many marriages do you think would take place if all the past were in its darkest fully known? . . .

"[apropos of a paper stolen] I have never possessed any woman. I never would seduce a pure woman—and I never would associate with an impure one—and yet I was weak to resist temptation."

But no attempts of Ruskin's, no matter how courageous or reasonable, were able to frustrate the mother's power: and on 22 November he wrote to Robert Horn: "This horrible apathy increases on me. . . . What of pain I may myself have deserved I neither know nor care—knowing that at least I have deserved much—but that poor girl who has been just now—with me—the victim of her mother and that *accursed woman at Perth*—has lost all the joy and peace of her youth for no fault of her own—only for the true mischance of being loved by me too faithfully. . . ."

Rose, meanwhile, more passive and resigned, poured out her

melancholy in a little volume of devotional verse which she named *Clouds and Night*.

"I would look back upon my life to-night,  
Whose years have scarcely numbered twenty-two;  
I would recall the darkness and the light,  
The hours of pain God's angels led me through;  
Out of his love he orders all things right,  
I, slow of heart, would feel that this is true.

I, in those years, have learnt that life is sad,  
Sad to heart-breaking did we walk alone.  
I, who have lost much which I never had,  
Yet which in ignorance I held mine own,  
Would leave that clouded past, its good and bad,  
Within His hands to whom all things are known."

## 3

Despite his intense and persistent nature, Ruskin had at first evidently believed this rupture of 1870 to be permanent; but the following year he was involved in yet another attempt at a reconciliation and a possible marriage with Rose. This time his suffering had been so profound, that during the summer, while he was at Matlock, it had brought on the mysterious illness through which Mrs. Cowper helped to nurse him. Since then he had made no further attempts to communicate with her. Nevertheless, Rose was seldom for long absent from his mind: and it was she whom he was addressing when he wrote in the preface to the 1871 edition of *Sesame and Lilies*: "First, be quite sure of one thing, that, however much you may know, and whatever advantages you may possess, and however good you may be, you have not been singled out, by the God who made you, from all the other girls in the world, to be especially informed respecting His own nature and character. You have not been born in a luminous point upon the surface of the globe, where a perfect theology might be expounded to you from your youth up, and where everything you were taught would be true, and everything that was enforced upon you, right."<sup>1</sup> And in his own defence, he now proclaimed for Rose those few words that, in 1868, he had told George MacDonald he would speak before all the world: "What I am, since I take on the function of a teacher, it is well that the reader should know, as far as I can tell him.

"Not an unjust person; not an unkind one; not a false one; a lover of order, labour and peace. That, it seems to me, is enough to give me right to say all I care to say on ethical subjects. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the thought of Rose's inconvenient piety coloured many

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, pp. 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

of his future pronouncements—as when he wrote in *Fors* for the benefit of his girl disciples: “**H**elp your companions, but don’t talk religious sentiment to them; and serve the poor, but for your lives, you little monkeys, don’t preach to them. They are probably, without in the least knowing it, fifty times better Christians than you. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

But if Ruskin could not forget Rose, nor could Rose forget him. Although his name was never spoken in her family circle, she brooded often upon the past, and the conflict of a divided mind drove her steadily nearer to the tragic precipice of mental darkness. Having persistently denied her the happiness in which they did not believe, her parents had been unable to offer her anything to take its place; and at home in Ireland she felt herself isolated, frustrated and unhappy. Many times her imagination would be filled with images of Ruskin and of those he loved: and just as, a year later, she thought often of the MacDonalds, and would picture the Retreat with its handsome Georgian façade; its spacious garden with the great walnut tree in the stable yard, the famous tulip tree, said to be the biggest in England, which gave shade to the gracious lawn; the statue of Artemis and her stag leaping from the shrubbery; and the road, bordered by immemorial elms, which widened into a semicircle opposite the house and separated it from the river; the red velvet chair she had sat in on her first visit, the walks in the garden in the twilight, boating on the river with the trees reflected in the water, games with the smaller children, or listening to Greville extracting a strange and mournful beauty from his violin; and often, at Harristown, would play his favourite *Lieder* upon the piano; so now she remembered with a strange poignancy this friend of Ruskin’s that she had met a few months before at dinner.

Thus in the spring of 1872, approaching a crisis of psychasthenia, Rose sat down and poured out her whole heart to George MacDonald. Did he believe, she asked, that God ever put people in positions wherein it was impossible to do His will, and equally impossible either to alter the position or to escape from it? Was it always wrong to kick against the pricks—not to accept with perfect content the circumstances provided by His Providence? Or did He use such means to teach His truths and make clear His commands even while it was impossible? And were this so, then how could one keep oneself from being tortured with disquiet? Then, with the complete abandon of hopelessness, she described to him in detail all the difficulties of her own life. “I have nothing in the world to do from day to day but what I like. All my parents want from me is that I should be well and happy. This seems a slight requirement but I cannot fulfil it—because the conditions of my life (which I cannot alter) do not make it possible for me to be well and happy—such as I am. For my daily life is simply hour after hour of spare time, bringing neither occupa-

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 66; *Works*, vol. 28, p. 637.

tion, work nor amusement except what I make for myself; but any amount of leisure for thinking, pondering, wishing, praying, enduring. To drive and walk, see one or two poor people, paint, read, play, feel very tired,—this is about the most that each day offers me. And at the end of it I feel like a child tired out after a long, lonely holiday. But continual physical pain—sometimes torturing—keeps me—even if it was my nature—from being placidly content with this lethargic life. Suffering makes me realise the sufferings of others, the sufferings in the world, and long vehemently, passionately, unconquerably, to help a little—to give all the help I *can*—towards lifting its weight off others. . . .

“I go about among our poor people here and come back to my own life of idle ‘comfort’ in despair sometimes. For it seems to me that they lead a life so much more like Christ’s than mine, and I go jingling off in the carriage with my ponies and bells from their door with a sadder heartache than any of them could know. I want to be more on an equality with them, serve them, help them, learn from them. They have more child-like trust and faith in *their* sufferings, than I have. For I have been brought up with a paradox continually before my eyes—‘Comfort, health, a quiet life and peace’ being all that my parents desire, while to be pained by realising the pain of others, *to be a hundredfold more pained by being kept from doing anything towards healing it*, they cannot understand. Be happy yourself, separate yourself from the world, and preach to those you can—this is my Father’s religion, and he is *very* good—but it is a religion that I cannot feel is the whole of Christianity.

“We lead an entirely lonely isolated life. My Mother hates the place and does not interest herself at all in it—and cannot bear me to talk to her on the subjects I feel most strongly upon, or to wish anything to be altered. Though she has been most devoted to me when I have been very ill she is not happy with me, and only by trying to alter myself entirely and suppress every thing that looks like discontent can I be with her and not pain and distress her.

“And just because my Father is good, and yet that his goodness leads him to such opposite conclusions and practice from mine we cannot be happy together . . . though we love one another deeply. He thinks I am restless and discontented because though there are ‘abundance of things’ that I possess, my life is not happy or healthy, and he does not understand how utterly the complete loneliness of it wears out my brain and mind till I am almost in despair. . . .

“Can you give me a word of counsel?—for I believe you will understand although I have expressed myself so dimly. For the life that I now live *is* my life, as I shall not marry (unless indeed one alters utterly and completely and miraculously during life!) and I want to live it well. . . .”

Evidently George MacDonald answered this letter with sympathy and tact; as a result of which Rose wrote him a series of letters dated 14-17 May, so incoherent and so despondent that in order to convey their mood it is necessary to assemble isolated extracts.

"Pain in my side and head makes my words, on paper, very confused and vague, although they would be clear enough if thoughts could write themselves.

"Why I wonder does God allow His instruments to go so out of tune, when at His word each part could be put in order making a perfect instrument? Sadder and more strange it is why He places, it seems, instruments together who are only capable of playing discords, or the same tune in different keys. . . . I am unhappy and not well—*because* it seems to me, the very things my nature, spirit and soul need I have not, and have missed for years, and cannot have. . . . I have been tossed to and fro God knows fearfully—heart and desires, head and judgment, *my* interpretation of right, and my Parents', all pulling different ways, or all mixing to puzzle a brain that cannot bear perplexity. But I do not think *anything* that you could say on the subject that it seems to me you would talk of, if you could speak to me, would alter it to me so that I could *act* differently, in the present. . . . What a rest the *heart*-life is to the head. Mine is almost all head—and I long so for the other. Last night I sat down at my Mother's feet and laid my head on her knee aching to rest my heart there too—But she said I was a baby instead of a young woman of twenty-four! and though I tried to draw closer and she tried to understand, the end of it was wakeful nights for us both. . . . I have been advised so many things by such different advisers that I am often at my wits' end. You know the 'position' in which I am is my natural position—at least it is in my home, my Father's and Mother's house. If a human being can belong to anything except God, I suppose a child belongs to her parents. If my eyes are opened to the knowledge that their life bars in mine what I feel to be healthful and right, still I am not *sure* that it is God's will that I should strive continually to alter it, or allow myself to judge them. . . .

"It pained me and cost me more thoughts than my head could bear to find a poor family (I don't think they are any one's tenants so I suppose nobody is to blame) living near here, father, mother and ten children really very *very* poor, so poor the newest baby whom the Mother was too ill to nurse could be fed on nothing better than bread and water,—and then to come down to dessert here and find forced strawberries and cream finishing up a 'sumptuous repast'. 'Ought these things so to be?' My Mother would be distressed for a whole day if I did not eat my dinner (for whether I eat enough or not often seems to be the most important matter in the twenty-four hours!) and here was a small life ready to pass away, and no one knew or cared. And yet we professed to obey the words, to follow the example

of Christ! . . . Of course I could ask, and get a cup of milk daily from our dairy, but I could not ask for and get an answer to the thoughts that overpowered me—and more than ever I feel that the life I live at home is not a life that I can live in, but only feel like a visitor trying to join with my father and mother's tastes and feelings and views as much as I can. . . . Besides, they think I have only to eat and take medicines and get quite well and then marry somebody and live after my own ideas. I know that what I need is not medicine and food and I shall not I believe marry. If it could have been so that I could have kept the *friend* who has brought such pain and suffering and torture and division among so many hearts—if there had never been anything but friendship between us—how much might have been spared. But now all that cannot be gone over again. . . . Mrs. Cowper-Temple said we should be as though living in separate worlds, and that this was best for him who is probably happy—and may—I cannot write any more about this. . . . How does God show one clearly what is right? Teachers, the Bible, a personal inward revelation, all may be mistaken. And at each fresh mistake I learn, alas, not only self-distrust but life- and God-distrust.

"For you see all my troubles came to me at the very door of life, and I have no experience of happy hopeful life, and this has made me alive to all that is sorrowful and painful, and doubtful of all that looks joy-giving. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

It was clear to George MacDonald from the tenor of these letters that Rose was in a very dangerous state and must be treated with the greatest tenderness and care. And to ensure doing her no harm, he even sent his reply to Mrs. Cowper-Temple to read, asking her to despatch it to Harristown only if it met with her approval.

Both George MacDonald and Mrs. Cowper-Temple believed that Rose was still suffering principally on account of the peculiarly painful nature of her estrangement from Ruskin; and, as Rose went to stay with Mrs. Cowper-Temple early in June, naturally her relations with him were discussed. But unfortunately, to unsettle the poor girl still further, after leaving Mrs. Cowper-Temple she went to stay at Tunbridge Wells with the aunt whom, two years before, Ruskin had begged to intercede on his behalf; and she, with what motive is not known, not only showed Rose the letters which Ruskin had sent her, but did not attempt, or was unable, to prevent the girl from translating them into an imaginary form that festered anew in her already morbid and over-exalted mind. So disastrous indeed, in addition to the calumnies already implanted in her mind, was the effect of reading these letters, that on 19 June she wrote to George MacDonald: "I wish, if it was possible to you, you would either one day give or send the enclosed to him who is your friend, and was mine. In the last two days all the worst has been confirmed to me, and

<sup>1</sup> Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, pp. 111-113.



through his own words. But only God can judge him—not I.”<sup>1</sup>

This letter, which was headed “After reading letters written by you in September 1870”, was never given to Ruskin by George MacDonald, doubtless because he realised the intense and unnecessary suffering it would have caused him; but it illustrates the acute degree of morbid religiosity and the tragic conflict which were now active again in Rose’s mind.

“How to call you and think of you I do not know, but you are and have been dear to me.

“What it has been to me to know all that I have perhaps only now, from your own writing, fully believed and known of your past life—God knows. I will not judge or condemn you. But I *must* turn away from you. Can you wonder, you who know what I have had to know, that my nature recoils from you?

“Your love to me, all your great perceptions of whatsoever things are good and lovely, your gifts—all that God has given you—these cannot expiate, but to my deep sorrow intensify and darken your sins against God’s law. . . .

“When I think what you *might* have been, to Christ, to other human souls, to me! How the angels must have sorrowed over you! How some hearts are sorrowing still!

“I do not wonder that your faith is shipwrecked—I can use no other words—that Christ is to you only the Christ that *others* believe in, whose belief perhaps you envy, that you cannot see beyond this life!

“Better not to have known the ways of righteousness than after you had known it, and while speaking the words of a man whose ‘eyes are opened’, to turn aside. . . .

“And I who have loved you cannot alter you, could not blot out one single stain, not if I could lay down my life for you—cannot even give myself the certain hope of meeting you hereafter.

“All I can do is to speak of you to Christ. At His feet we might meet; in His love our hearts might be drawn together again; in His forgiveness, redemption, renewing all that is past, even the bitter shadow of remorse, might be blotted out as a thick cloud—only teaching the infiniteness of that grace which can ‘much more abound’, the depth and patience and intensity of that love that passeth knowledge.

“Believing as I do, the horror that your sins awake in me could only be, not removed but turned into joy by the knowledge that they had brought you to His feet, to be born again as a little child, and from thenceforth *loving much* as none but one who has felt personally what Love’s forgiveness is, can love.

“Be Christ’s, and one day or other I shall find ‘my piece that was lost’. For your sake, for His sake, for my sake—I who believe in a

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 19.6.1872, from Culverden Lodge; original with Mr. G. Leon.

day to come when the Great White Throne shall be set and the judgment opened and our secret sins shall stand in the Light of His countenance—let me look forward to a joy in store for me at that day. Hear His Voice whose love you have rejected, whose promises you disbelieve—whose laws you have trampled under foot while speaking of them to others—hear His Voice who came to save His people from their sins, to guide their feet into the way of peace, to give them repentance and remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and life everlasting. Believe in Him with the faith that makes His followers' life one with His.

"You may scoff at my words, but I can write no others. Is it a light thing to lose eternally what one has loved? one for whom one desires Christ's blessing and one's own?"<sup>1</sup>

There is no evidence as to whether George MacDonald himself read this letter or not: probably he did not; the few words sent with it being sufficient to inform him of its likely import, and to cause him to assure Rose that a true interpretation of the facts would do much to alleviate her pain. Such an interpretation he doubtless promised her on their imminent meeting.

But Rose was now in the state when she could find relief only in self-dramatisation. "But, dear friend," she replied, "nothing can help me now—at least nothing can take away the burden that crushes me.

"In his own writing I have what in almost all particulars corresponds to the statements in the letters you read and I do not and cannot disbelieve any one of them. I have his own account of it written two years ago—not to me. And nothing can make that darkness light to me.

"He thinks because he has loved me strongly, and has enormous perceptions and love of what is good and what is beautiful, and has been given many good gifts by God, that this overweighs transgressions against God's laws, sin against *knowledge* of God's will and admiration of purity.

"I cannot write of it. If he had been a heathen it would have been different, but he who had been brought up in Christ's religion, who had been given by God such power to know and love what was divine to sin as he did while writing as he did—it utterly overpowers me with the mysterious ghastliness of it all.

"I know that to receive and love Christ, to repent and be as a little child would blot out the past indeed—but *has* he repented? Does he ever believe in Christ, and Eternity? I who have loved (do love him) am powerless to alter him, or lighten my own suffering."<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after writing this letter, Rose went to stay for a few days

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.9.1872: partly quoted in MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, pp. 114-15; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, 18.6.1872, from Culverton Lodge; original with Mr. G. Leon.

at the Retreat, where Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald were able to alter her attitude at least to the extent of persuading her tentatively to agree to see Ruskin if a meeting could be arranged. MacDonald therefore immediately wrote to Ruskin, who was now in Venice with Lady Trevelyan's sister, Mrs. Hilliard, her daughter Constance, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Severn and Albert Goodwin. "I will not move unless in certainty of seeing her," Ruskin wired from Venice on 30 June. "If you and Mrs. MacDonald can bring her to Italy I will meet you at Geneva." And on the same day he wrote sternly: "I will not allow any more doubtful measures in this thing: nor let my thoughts return to it, unless in absolute certainty of seeing her. Nor, even if she would see me, should I be justified in leaving my work here at present. A journey to Italy would probably be good for *her*—certainly your own work might be, in the end, brighter for it.

"If you and Mrs. MacDonald can take charge of her, I will come to meet you, to Geneva, and we would return to Venice all together—if R. so pleased—or I would return alone—after having forgiven each other what each may have to forgive.

"I stay here for a fortnight yet—you can deliberate what is to be done. But if nothing can be done—I will have no talking. I have thrice all but lost my life for this, and my life is now not mine. The little of it she has left me must be tormented with anger no more—with hope it cannot now be disturbed—the time for that is past. I trusted her with my whole heart: she threw it to the dogs to eat—and must be satisfied: but we might at least contrive that we could each think of the other without horror. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Three days later, for fear that this letter might miscarry, Ruskin wrote again, proposing that the MacDonalds should bring Rose to Geneva. "She has every means of ascertaining what I am, by merely hearing my friends, as well as my enemies: the first are worthier than the last, as it happens; to myself, she has given the lie three times over; and shall not do it again: but Mr. Cowper-Temple has still, I suppose, in his hands, the evidence I gave him to lay before her last year.

"She need not fear exciting vain hopes—nor need you—she has broken my heart much too thoroughly and finely for any such weeds to grow in the rifts: but she ought not to allow herself to be made any longer a mere tool of torture to me.

"As soon as she has made up her mind, telegraph to me, as my work here is now disturbed by my not knowing what I may have to do; and I cannot quite shut down the shadows into their quietness."<sup>2</sup>

But with his sensitive and intense nature, Ruskin was already far more deeply agitated than he had at first realised. "Kindly set down, without fail (by return post if you can), in the plainest English you know—the precise things R. says of me—or has heard said of me,"

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, pp. 117–18.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 119.

he wrote again on 5 July. "I am very weary of justifying myself—and if I do so once more—it will not be for this woman's sake who has killed me with her want of plain justice to the truest love ever woman threw away—but for the sake of many others who now need me.

"But I am a little surprised at your letter. Have I then no friends but you—whose opinion is worth anything to R.—was there no one who could have been listened to but you only?

"*All this* was gone over last year—during and causing the continuance of that Matlock illness.

"Write instantly—and speak plainly and *utterly*."<sup>1</sup> Long before Ruskin could receive any answer to this demand, however, fresh letters arrived in Venice both from Mr. and from Mrs. MacDonald. "I had your wife's letter—and your neutralisation of it, yesterday," Ruskin informed George MacDonald on 8 July. "I will come home, but I cannot instantly, and when I come, it will not be to talk.

"Your telegram said you wanted to know my wishes. I wish that I could recover lost years,—and raise the dead. But not much more. I do *not* wish Rose to die. What can in any wise be done for her peace—or—if she be still capable of it—happiness—I am ready to do—for my part—if she will make up her mind, and tell me when she has, face to face (I will hear her no otherwise). If she only wants to know my character, let her not trouble me. I have surely already done enough—though it be little—to enable her to judge of it somewhat—without depending on one man's faith in me. She might have heard something of it from my father and mother—but they were partial; and are now out of court. What I choose to say of myself, I have said to all men—and women, in the beginning of *Sesame and Lilies*. Let her read that.

"For your own satisfaction, speak to Mr. Cowper-Temple. Determine with him what to do when I come home, which, God willing, I will do about this day next month. You will have had time to think. . . . I wrote with absolute openness to her aunt. They burn my letters—and then ask me to write more. I am not a Saint. Rose is—but a cruel one. She knows, I believe, the worst of me—what good there is in me she has power to learn, if she will."<sup>2</sup>

George MacDonald considered this letter to be both unsatisfactory and ungracious, and it is fortunate that a copy of his reply, written in his own hand, was later found by his son preserved among his papers. "There seems to be some lying spirit abroad whose work is to change the meaning of words—written words especially—in their way," he returned. "For an instance you say you received my wife's letter and my *neutralization* of it: what this means I have not a notion. But it is no great matter, perhaps, beside other things.

"I find from the tone of your letter, dated the 8th, that I must have

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 5.7.1872, from Venice; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19.

mistaken the degree in which you trusted me. You write as if I were intruding into your affairs. I must therefore try but once more to make you see how things are, and cease.

"First of all, I must repudiate with what would be contempt, but for the love I bear you, your requesting me to speak with Mr. C.T. for my own satisfaction. What satisfaction can I want? Even if you had not yourself satisfied me concerning what I wanted no satisfaction in, years ago, what right should I have to seek satisfaction? I want no satisfaction concerning you. Nor will I consult with him at all. I have nothing to consult about.

"My offence seems to be that I have made so much of R.'s faith in us, as enables her to hope in regard to the untruth of what is said of you. I told you that to let you see how lost she was in the affair. You speak of explanations: *not one of these reached her*. Mr. C.T. wrote to her father, probably: you sent letters to her aunt. The former was never mentioned to her; the latter she has only seen within the last fortnight or so, and they were interpreted to her, in her girlish ignorance, by the lurid light of Mrs. M.'s letters to her mother, as confirming the worst things in the latter. Surrounded with false and devilish representations, and those coming to her from the lips of another, hearing no defence of you, or anything you said to rebut the charges. . . ."<sup>1</sup> At this point the document breaks off. But it was evidently sufficient to convince Ruskin of the perilous state of Rose's mind. Before it arrived, however, fresh telegrams and letters from him continued to arrive at the Retreat, still imbued with the same note of passionate resentment. "As you must know, your Venetian letters were unsatisfactory to me," he wrote on 14 July. "In one thing, mistaken. You say you may give me *more* suffering than I have had. You shall do nothing of the kind. I have had enough, on the subject—and am resolved to have no more trouble about it. I have spoiled a quantity of good work in leaving Venice—and had nearly spoiled my friends' journey home—acting as I always do, too impetuously. Their pleasure shall not be broken in upon by this affair. It is exactly ten years since R. wrote to me in this city—saying—'a wreath of wild roses is not so easily disentangled'. I have had ten years of suffering, since then; and my story of Troy is ended. If R. chooses to be friends—she may—but may wait a fortnight, I should think, after keeping me waiting—six years instead of three since February 2nd of 1866. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Rose, who was lingering in England against the wishes of her parents, in the hope that Ruskin would return at once, wrote to the MacDonalds on the 16th that she was "at her wits' end. I wish I could in any way thank you, or hope that some recompense might

<sup>1</sup> Letter, undated: part quoted in MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-16; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 14.7.1872: part quoted in MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 119; original with Mr. G. Leon.

come to you for all the care, trouble, kindness, anxiety and heart pain and perplexity you have had through me. I shall try and wait three days—and yet I cannot bear the idea that you are sending for him after his apparent unwillingness. . . . Will try to wait and hope and pray—for three days—at least.” Then followed the tragic and revealing postscript: “My father and my mother want me to come home on Monday and I feel I ought to obey them.

“I am so afraid that alluding to those letters *may* give additional pain—vain suffering—to your friend. . . . I know what the misery of believing utterly the ‘evil reports’ I have heard of him has been to me. I cannot trust him as you do.

“Remember the words and belief of my parents and the advisers and counsellors who have brought me up *must* weigh with me, and come to me as they could not to you for they at least are the divinely appointed guardians to whom I must give heed.

“If your faith in Christ was wholly shaken, or irretrievably gone, would you not be a different man, would not life be a different thing to you? You will understand how almost in the *same* way the absolute over-turning of a strongly spiritual love and faith alters the whole existence—and a child’s love, growing on year after year deepening in silence and suffering, becomes a strong intense spiritual power and passion.

“Crush it.”<sup>1</sup>

By this time Mrs. Cowper-Temple, with whom Rose was staying in Curzon Street, was also deeply concerned as to the date of Ruskin’s arrival, and more telegrams began to pour into the Retreat—from her enquiring Ruskin’s present address: from Ruskin, at various stages of his journey, who now, having realised the urgency of the situation, was rushing madly back across Europe, trying to accomplish the various tasks he had set himself at the same time as best he could. “I have been hindered again here, and can’t now reach Geneva till Wednesday and Folkestone till Saturday,” he wrote from Simplon on 23 July, “unless there is something in the Geneva letters to hasten me. I ask myself vainly again and again—what your—‘if you knew all’—can possibly mean. I believe I know more than all that is necessary to determine my journey.” But evidently there was much in the Geneva letters to hasten him: for two days later another telegram arrived at the Retreat to say that he expected to be home the following evening.<sup>2</sup>

On 27 July he arrived.

“I came home at speed at last from Geneva—half killing the poor girl and her mother whom I had charge of—and find not a word here from any of you—but an invitation for Sunday afternoon comes this morning,” he wrote from Denmark Hill.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.7.1872: part quoted in MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 119; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 23.7.1872, from Simplon; original with Mr. G. Leon.

"Well—it's like all the rest—only please understand, before we meet, that I have not misunderstood any of your letters or proceedings, which have been all that is kind, except only in your not doing the one thing I desired you to do—to write briefly in plain English *what* was to be put out of the child's head—and in your not telling me that she had come from Ireland to see me. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, steadily approaching a crisis, Rose waited for their imminent meeting with eagerness and apprehension. "The time is drawing so near now, and I cannot suppress my fits of unconquerable restlessness, and I haven't even the power of putting what I want to say into words, my head gets so tired when I try to speak," she wrote to Mrs. MacDonald. "No one knows what a different person I should be if that constant brain-tiredness or congestion or whatever it is was removed. I fear at the first interview I shall be too . . . I can't find the right word . . . to be really myself. . . . Pray for your eldest born, she wants a Mother's help just now—and hasn't even a strong reasoning power in her own head." <sup>2</sup>

After a short visit to Harristown, in order to please her parents, Rose returned to England and stayed for a few days at the Retreat. Both physically and psychically ill, pathetically frail in appearance, with her eyes large and lustrous in her thin face, and her cheeks hectically flushed, she was too unwell even to sit at table; and, served apart, could scarcely bring herself to eat, for a meal, a few green peas, or a strawberry and half an Osborne biscuit.

Here, during the long afternoons, she would sit with Ruskin alone in the MacDonalds' lofty study with its red flock wall paper, its large brass gas chandelier, and its indigo ceiling studded with gold and silver stars, while he tried to fix on paper forever the strange and unearthly beauty of her face.

Now beyond all thought or hope of marriage, Mrs. MacDonald wrote an affectionate letter of regret to Ruskin for the pain that she felt these long, quiet afternoons must have afforded him. "A pretty note from Mrs. MacDonald came last night saying how sorry you both were for me," Ruskin wrote to MacDonald on 11 August, "and it is right to be so; but not to be grieved that you had part in bringing this to pass, for it is much better as it is than as it was, and I had three days of heaven, which I would—for my own part and if I had not had work to do—have very thankfully bought with all the rest of my life—if that price had been set on them. *They were clear* gain out of the ruin; more may yet be saved; but even as it is, I am better far than I was. . . . I thought before I saw her, that she could never undo the evil she has done—but she brought me back into life, and put the past away as if it had not been—with the first full look of her eyes. What she has done now, she has no power to help—it is

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 27.7.1872, from Herne Hill; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter, undated; original with Mr. G. Leon.

natural—human pain, and not deadly—but think what it was to have her taught daily horror of me—for years and years, in silence. I had prepared myself to hear that she was dead—and had died in indignation with me. I know now that she is ill—but she is at peace with me, and I may help to save her. I think you may be *very* happy in having done all this, for us both. It is of no use trying to tell you anything that I think or feel about the possible future. Her illness is very grave,—her entire soul and being have been paralysed by the poisoned air. What I can or may be allowed to do for her, I will—whatever she does to me. She still is happy to be with me, if she will let herself be happy; and she can't forbid my loving her, though she fain would; how infinitely better this is for me than if I had never found the creature. Better all the pain, than to have gone on—as I might twelve years ago—with nothing to love—through life.”<sup>1</sup>

A few days later Rose went to stay with the Cowper-Temples at Broadlands, and Ruskin, his hope slowly rekindling, spent another day at her side. “I had another day—from morn till even—on Monday—and should be a little more than content to die now—if I am never to have another,” he wrote to George MacDonald the same day: “but I am so thankful to find her so noble. It is not her fault but her glory, that she cannot love me better. I only wonder she ever loved me at all.”<sup>2</sup> And again: “I prayed for her to be given to me yesterday morning as I have not been able to pray for ten years. Seven hours afterwards, she was standing in the same room beside me, mine.

“Not yet quite with her own consent; but with her utter confession—and promise never more to give me grief—except in death—and I believe that for neither of us shall it be grief—even then.

“For the faction of this world has past, for me, in winning her—and death cannot conquer me more.”<sup>3</sup> In his diary he recorded: “Broadlands, Tuesday. Entirely calm and clear morning. The mist from the river at rest among the trees, and rosy light on its fold of blue, and I, for the first time these ten years, happy. Took up Renan's St. Paul as I was dressing, and read a little; a piece of epistle in smaller type caught my eye as I was closing the book: *Grâce à Dieu pour son ineffable don.*”<sup>4</sup>

And on 16 August Ruskin added in his diary: “To-day came my consolation. I say ‘to-day’. But it is two days past; for I could not write on the 14th, and scarcely since—for joy.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 15.8.1872; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary*, 13.8.1872: *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 16.8.1872: *Works*, vol. 35, p. lxxii.



But this was the last taste of ecstasy that Ruskin was to know; though the memory of it lingered in his heart for many years, and he referred to it later in *Fors Clavigera*. For even as he rejoiced, Rose La Touche, entering a new phase of mental instability, was writing to Mrs. MacDonald: "It has been hard to me to write—indeed impossible or I would have done so before, and now what can I say, except that it has not ended as you wished and hoped—but what is 'it' and what 'is ended'? His last words to me were a blessing. I felt too dumb with pain to answer him yet God knows if any heart had power to bless another mine used that power for him. Though I could not yield him up to greater love than mine.

"I cannot be to him what he wishes, or return the vehement love which he gave me, which petrified and frightened me, mother bird, as you will understand. Don't be hard on me. When we see 'face to face' in that Kingdom where love will be perfected and yet there will be no marrying or giving in marriage we shall understand one another. Meantime God cannot have meant nothing but pain to grow out of the strange link of love that still unites us to one another and somehow or other it must work for good. But we are separate and free from one another as far as all outward relationships are concerned. I believe even that at present it would be impossible to have any intercourse or any friendship.

"I cannot explain more to you now. I shall never be sorry for this meeting tho' it seems now to have brought pain. We cannot see to the end of things that concern heart and soul growths that have no end.

"And we are powerless to be anything but true—if we are God's at all—tho' to our deep sorrow we may be unwise and stumble. . . .

"I hope he will come and see you. I feel sure that God and happiness yes and joy also, *not* disappointment and loss and pain, are in store for him—but in what form God knows best."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, when she left Broadlands, Ruskin accompanied Rose back to town in the train, and made a drawing for her: and having gone on to the Leycesters, some relations of Mrs. Cowper-Temple, she even sent for him to join her; and Ruskin had the further joy of standing by her side in church and holding her prayer book for her. This prayer book, inscribed by her with some verses of Swinburne, Rose sent later to Mrs. MacDonald; and George MacDonald sent it on to Ruskin. But by now Rose had lost all hold upon reality, and Ruskin was doomed to a new period of the intensest misery. "In the morning, in church at Toft, beside R.," he recorded on 18 August. "Now at the corner of a room in the Euston Square hotel, altogether miserable."<sup>2</sup> "No friend could have behaved more cruelly than she

<sup>1</sup> Undated letter from Broadlands: MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, 18.8.1872: *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxix.

has done to me," he wrote to George MacDonald on 8 September from Brantwood; "but she is mad—and it is an experience for me of what 'possession' means, which I could not have had otherwise, nor have I any just cause to be angry with her, but only to be grieved for us both—and angry enough with the people who have driven her to this. . . ." But he could not suppress his bitterness, nor the stirring of the Swiftian savagery that was an essential part of his nature. "Would you kindly write to her saying nothing more than that you are requested to direct her to send the drawing I gave her (in the railway carriage coming up from Broadlands back to me, carefully packed, as I made it for Oxford, not for her, [and say that I will do one for her, of another tree, hemlock—]"<sup>1</sup>

"I have scratched that out because I am writing in fierce anger though I should not be angry. But I think I am quite right in asking for the other drawing of olive back: and I'll make one of hemlock for my own satisfaction."<sup>2</sup>

The same evening he confided to his diary: "Fallen and wicked and lost in all thought; must recover by work."

But he did not recover at once. "You must ask for the drawing," he told MacDonald two days later. "She cannot be allowed to say in her heart, Peace, when there is no Peace.

"And I pray you also to complete my message and say that I will send her if she chooses a study of *Bella Donna* and *Monk's Hood*; that I could make a more curious drawing of hemlock but I know she will like the Christian better than the Greek poisons. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

As often in the past under similar stress, it would seem that Ruskin's mind was for a short time perilously affected by the uncontrollable turmoil of his emotions. ". . . Write quickly, please," he bade MacDonald again on the 10th, "with order to return the drawing. I am afraid lest she should be gone abroad before getting the message. And complete it and say I will draw her some *bella donna* with monk's hood: and that I could make a more delicate drawing of hemlock, but knew she would prefer Christian to Greek poisons.

"(Besides this between us only hemlock gives sleep but aconite opens the eyes and mine are opened wide, at last.)

"I was arranging my books to-day, heaped out of cases, and found Swinburne's ballads, on the top of the *Parents' Assistant*. Did you ever read *Dolores*? I used to think it his finest but never thought to find this portrait in its first verse (I've only altered one word):

"Cold eyelids, that hide like a jewel  
Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour.  
The icy white limbs and the cruel  
Red mouth like a venomous flower."

<sup>1</sup> The words in brackets are scored through in the MS.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 8.9.1872; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished letter of 10.9.1872; original with Mr. G. Leon.

"What could she mean by writing that in the prayerbook but I'm glad I know it. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

As the days passed, his bitterness slowly changed to the acute despondency of disillusionment. "My part and lot is truly to bear all things from her," he assured MacDonald in his next letter, "and I would take it bravely, only first there is the deadly fact whether it is the Devil that makes me feel it or not that she is not worth my fidelity to her, and that the fidelity itself is worthless for it is only because she is pretty. If she hadn't a straight nose and red lips, what should I care for her? And then secondly I can't pray for her, because I know well enough and so does she, which makes her so angry that if at last I didn't get her there would be an end of prayer for me. . . ."

"She returned my last letter unopened so I have no resource but you, as of old. My only fault had been letting her see I still hope. I got the returned letter at the church door last Sunday, and walked home again. Even Joanie couldn't go in. When the thing one meant to pray for turns out not worth prayer, what is one to do? . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Gradually the bitterness was slowly purged away, and only despair remained. Yet never again, after the terrible disillusion of this time, could he forget that it was chiefly Rose's beauty that held him in captivity . . . "the dim chance of finding those things in the next world does me no good," he told Mrs. Cowper-Temple the following year, "and though I've known some really nice girls, in my time, in this world, who wouldn't perhaps have been so hard on me as some people, none of them had a slim waist and straight nose quite to my fancy. . . ."

Carlyle, who saw him as soon as he returned to London, wrote to John Forster: "Ruskin good and affectionate; he has fallen into thick quiet despair again on the personal question, and meant all the more to go ahead with fire and sword on the universal one."<sup>3</sup>

In his diary, on the last day of the year, Ruskin entered: "Intensely dark and rainy morning. But I, on the whole, victorious, and ready for new work, and my possessions pleasant to me in my chosen, or appointed, home, and my hand finding its deed."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 10.9.1872, from Brantwood; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of (?) 11.9.1872, from Brantwood; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> A. Carlyle, *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 2, p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary*, 31.12.1872: *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxix.

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## Chapter V

1. *Another reconciliation: Rose's decline: Ruskin consoles her for the last time: her tragic death: Ruskin's grief.* 2. *He tries to appear cheerful: plans further works: "Proserpina" and "Deucalion".* 3. *Darkened rooms: the spirit of Rose appears in the drawing-room at Broadlands: Ruskin identifies Rose with Beatrice and St. Ursula: he loses his mental balance: a dream-marriage.* 4. *Ruskin's quarrel with Octavia Hill.* 5. *He becomes his own publisher.* 6. *The Whistler case: the Grosvenor Gallery: Ruskin castigates the "Falling Rocket" in "Fors", and attacks its painter: Whistler takes action for libel: Whistler's career and character: the trial: divided loyalties of many witnesses: judgment, with contemptuous damages, for Whistler: "Art and Art Critics": Ruskin's unpublished "apology".*

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### I

SINCE the beatific but tragic reunion of 1872, the relations between Ruskin and Rose had finally reassumed their characteristic graph of hope alternating with despair. By the beginning of 1874 Rose had become so ill that it was considered necessary to remove her from home; and on 3 February she wrote to Mrs. MacDonald from Broadlands, where she was visiting the Cowper-Temples: "I am not at all prosperous and sometimes despair of ever being so . . . I have never felt so ill—even being here does me no good, and I am almost glad to be going thoroughly into a doctor's hands in a few days . . . and be entirely under his treatment for as long as he likes."<sup>1</sup> But even this treatment gave her no relief, and at the end of June, she wrote again from Tunbridge Wells, where she was staying with her aunt, that if she were getting better it was only very slowly, and felt like the other thing. After a further ineffective course of treatment, Rose returned, less well than ever, to her home in Ireland: and from here she wrote in misery to Mrs. MacDonald, shortly before Christmas: "My only hope is for the time when I shall have 'shuffled off this mortal coil'—but that may be a long way off."<sup>2</sup>

After that, her physical and mental condition deteriorated rapidly: and she had once more to be removed from home. Before the light had quite departed from her mind, however, she wrote Ruskin several letters which gave him the greatest joy, and once he was able even to visit her. "She has come back to me," he wrote to a friend, "finding she can't get on without some of the love she used to have:"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 3.2.1874, from Romsey; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 17.12.1874, from Harristown; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Frances Winwar: *The Russettis and Their Circle*, p. 260.

and he had even intended taking her to see Carlyle; but she was too ill to go at the last moment. But by now—estrangement or reconciliation—it was all one: for by December the last traces of sanity had departed from her; and by January he knew that she was dying. Between his passionate diatribes against narrow sectarianism and pietistic evangelicalism, he poured out the fact, in *Fors*. Twelve years later, he wrote of this bitter period to “Francesca”. “Of course she was out of her mind in the end; one evening in London she was raving violently till far into the night; they could not quiet her. At last they let me into her room. She was sitting up in bed; I got her to lie back on the pillow, and lay her head in my arms as I knelt beside it.

“They left us, and she asked me if she should say a hymn, and I said yes, and she said, ‘Jesus, lover of my soul’ to the end, and then fell back tired and went to sleep. And I left her.”<sup>1</sup> “Poor Rose is entirely broken—like her lover—” he wrote to George MacDonald after this tragic evening, 25 February, “and what good there may be for either must be—where Heaven is—but I don’t know that much of the Universe—and of Time.”<sup>2</sup> But the mental and physical strain was by now almost more than Ruskin could bear. “Really,” he wrote to Norton on 13 February, 1875, “the one thing that I physically want is one of those Graces out of Botticelli’s picture of the Spring. I can’t make out how that confounded fellow was able to see such pretty things, or how he lived among them. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

On 26 May, at seven o’clock in the morning, before even her parents could reach her, Rose had died. “I was away into the meadows, to see buttercup and clover and bean blossom, when the news came that the little story of my wild Rose was ended, and the hawthorn blossoms this year would fall—over her,” he wrote to Carlyle on 4 June, from Oxford. “Since which piece of news, I have not had a day but in more or less active business, in which everybody congratulates and felicitates me, and must be met with civil cheerfulness.” To smile, and speak suave words during the period which followed his bereavement was a necessity to be accomplished; and though he could scarcely work for several days, and felt as if his hands and feet were quite devoid of blood, sternly and effectively he accomplished it.<sup>4</sup>

“You have fought a better fight, I think, than you yourself know,” George MacDonald wrote him in condolence, “and His gentleness will make you great in the kingdom of love. . . .

“For Rose, is there anything fitting but gladness? The growing weight is gone, the gravestone heaved from off her; the fight with that which was and yet was not herself is over. It may be she haunts you now with ministrations. Anyhow the living God does. Richter says

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16.3.1886: Lucia Gray Swett, *John Ruskin's Letters to Francesca and Memoirs of the Alexanders* (1931), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 25.2.1875; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 13.2.1875: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 4.6.1875: *Works*, vol. 37, pp. 167–8.

it is only in God that two souls can meet. I am sure it is true. My wife's heart is with yours in your loss. She sends her love. . . ."<sup>1</sup> "I have fought no good fight except that the little fight I have made is from a narrow vantage-ground," Ruskin replied, "for you know so far as I can see or feel or understand, she is only gone where the hawthorn blossoms go."<sup>2</sup>

"That death is very bad for me," Ruskin wrote to Dr. John Brown a fortnight later: "*seal* of a great fountain of sorrow which can never now ebb away: a dark lake in the fields of life as one looks back—Cornish, with Sarcophagus Mountains round. Meanwhile I live in the outside of me and can still work. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

And to Charles Eliot Norton, a few weeks afterwards: "I have not been writing, because that death, as you will so well understand, has made so much of my past life at once dead weight to me that I feel as I did when I first got out of bed after my illness at Matlock, as if my limbs were of lead—mentally and bodily. This is so with me just now, and I only fight through by going on with mechanical work all I can—but the effect on my general health has been very paralysing, and it was no use writing about it. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

## 2

Yet Ruskin struggled not to be conquered by his personal suffering. He stiffened his face to a smile, and courteously received princely visitors to his art school. He planned a formidable programme of future work; and for immediate diversion, he had built an old-fashioned posting carriage with a place for luggage and his favourite contraption of side pockets for necessary impedimenta, and with a specially hired and accoutred postilion, sought to revive the enchanted past by posting with Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Severn from London to the North. Nevertheless, beside this apparent frivolity, there persisted and grew the intense desire to be of greater service: and with a deepening truth he might have written to his cousin now, as he had written her two years before: "Sometimes the flowers make me much more sad than the wind and rain: and the distant views always make me think of my father in his grave. And the mystery of it all becomes perpetually more terrific to me. But it is because I am not moved *enough* by it, that I am so woeful,—because I am not trying enough to do right, and feel base as well as unhappy. I know you can't understand this, but it is so. The only thing to be done by any of us is to be kind and cheerful always."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 30.5.1875, from Great Tangle Manor, nr. Guildford; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 18.6.1875: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 15.7.1875: *ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 20.4.1873: *ibid.*, p. 66.

"It is curious I have so little satisfaction in work done: only a wild longing to do more, and always thinking of beginning life—when I am drawing so fast towards its end,"<sup>1</sup> Ruskin had recorded on 11 April, 1873. And indeed, as the years passed, his work grew steadily more catholic and discursive. During the 'seventies, he not only produced his comprehensive and often erudite series of lectures upon art, but each month he published one of his unique, idiosyncratic and compellingly fascinating numbers of *Fors*; besides producing in parts his charming and sensitive work upon botany—*Proserpina*: his interesting and stimulating work upon geology—*Deucalion*: and such beguiling guide books of his beloved Italy as the famous *Mornings in Florence*. No wonder that on one occasion he was compelled to write to Mrs. Severn: "My work is very complex just now. Birds, *Fors*, Flowers and Botticelli all in a mess."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, his plans and projects at this time were titanic, and could have been accomplished only if he had a whole life of health and energy still before him. In his introduction to *Deucalion*, written in July 1875, shortly after Rose's death, he stated that he had now collected sufficient materials for "a most interesting (in my opinion) history of fifteenth-century Florentine art, in six octavo volumes; a life of Walter Scott, with analysis of modern epic art, in seven volumes; a life of Xenophon, with analysis of the general principles of education, in ten volumes; a commentary on Hesiod, with final analysis of the principles of Political Economy, in nine volumes, and a general description of the geology and botany of the Alps, in twenty-four volumes."<sup>3</sup> What with his duties as Slade Professor, his obligations to *Fors*, and the enormous correspondence it involved him in, and his own uncertain health, he decided, therefore, that "it will be only prudent, however humiliating, to throw together at once, out of the loose stones collected for this many-towered city which I am not able to finish, such fragments of good marble as may perchance be useful to future builders, and to clear away, out of sight, the lime and other rubbish which I meant for mortar".<sup>4</sup>

In *Proserpina* (1875-1886)—"Studies of Wayside Flowers, while the air was yet pure, among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which my Father knew"<sup>5</sup>—Ruskin wished to present, for children, a system of botany, in Latin and English, but not in "a doggish mixture of the refuse of both", devoid of all "unclean or debasing associations",<sup>6</sup> beautifully and accurately illustrated, which would enable them to understand the delicate, intricate beauty, and the divers mysterious natures of such plants as they might

<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, 11.4.1873: *Works*, vol. 23, p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 3.3.1873: *ibid.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Deucalion*: *Works*, vol. 26, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, vol. 25, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

encounter in their natural wanderings. "This book will be nothing but process," he declared in the first chapter. "I don't mean to assert anything positively in it from the first page to the last. Whatever I say, is to be understood only as a conditional statement—liable to, and inviting correction. And this the more because I am at war with the botanists. I can't ask them to help me, and then call them names afterwards. I hope only for a contemptuous heaping of coals on my head by correction of my errors from them."<sup>1</sup> "What we specially need for present educational purposes," he had said in his lecture, "'The Relation of Art to Use,' is to know, not the anatomy of plants, but their biography—how and where they live and die, their tempers, benevolences, malignities, distresses and virtues. We want them drawn from their youth to their age—from bud to fruit. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin's approach to botany was aesthetic as against utilitarian. For him, the cherry exists only as a seed to produce future cherry blossom, not the blossom in order to produce cherries: and the first requirement of the scientist is the sense of wonder, without which no mastery of instruments or patience of attention can produce more than a sterile knowledge of facts. His nomenclature is poetic, idiosyncratic, and always suggestive, such as that names ending in A, if they are girls' names, will designate only flowers that are "pretty and perfectly good",<sup>3</sup> while names ending in Um will predicate "some power of active or suggestive evil".<sup>4</sup> His chief aim was complete and practical knowledge, no matter how limited—for in his belief it was better to know "the habits of one plant than the names of a thousand; and wiser to be happily familiar with those that grow in the nearest field, than arduously cognisant of all that plume the isles of the Pacific, or illumine the Mountains of the Moon".<sup>5</sup>

His claim for *Proserpina*, as his claim for his other books, was that it was right and true so far as it reached. "None of them pretend to be Kosmoses," he assured his readers. "None to be systems of Positivism or Negativism, on which the earth is in future to swing instead of on its old, worn-out poles; and none to be beyond the power of common people's eyes, ears and noses, 'aesthetic'. They tell you that the world is so big, and can't be made bigger, however you puff or bloat yourself; but that, on modern mental nourishment, you may very easily be made smaller. They tell you that two and two are four, that ginger is hot in the mouth, that roses are red, and smuts black. Not assuming themselves to be pious they yet assure you that there is such a thing as piety in the world, and that it is wiser than impiety; and not themselves pretending to be works of genius, they yet assure you that there is such a thing as genius in the world, and that it is

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 20, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 25, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 359.



meant for the light and delight of the world. . . . Written in honest English, of good Johnsonian lineage, touched here and there with colour of a little finer or Elizabethan quality: and the things they tell you are comprehensible by any moderately industrious and intelligent person, and *accurate*, to a degree which the accepted methods of modern science cannot, in my own particular fields, approach."<sup>1</sup>

*Deucalion* (1875–1883), and other *Studies in Rocks and Stones*, was Ruskin's final contribution to the study of geological matters which had absorbed him intermittently from the days of his boyhood when his greatest ambition had been to be the elected president of the Geological Society. Here are incorporated, from the experiments with butter and honey made in the kitchen at Broadlands with the co-operation of "an infinitely conceding and patiently collaborating cook", and the experiments made with dough in the kitchen at Brantwood, to his long and carefully pondered theory of the movements of glaciers, all the results of many years of interested and impassioned investigation: though his original hope that in it he would be able to give some account of "the work done by the real masters and fathers of Geology" came to nothing. Indeed, *Deucalion*, like all Ruskin's other works, is interesting less in its actual subject, than in its illumination of its author's whole attitude to that subject, which, in this case, he expressed with customary eloquence in the second chapter of the second volume of that work. "I have never given myself out for a philosopher; nor spoken of the teaching attempted in connection with any subject of enquiry, as other than that of a village showman's 'Look—and you shall see'. But, during the last twenty years, so many baseless semblances of philosophy have announced themselves, and the laws of decent thought and rational question have been so far transgressed (even in our universities, where the moral philosophy they once taught is now only remembered as an obscure tradition, and the natural sciences in which they are proud, presented only as an impious conjecture), that it is forced upon me, as the only means of making what I have said on these subjects permanently useful, to put into clear terms the natural philosophy and natural theology to which my books refer, as accepted by the intellectual leaders of all past time. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

## 3

"Seal of a great fountain of sorrow which can never now ebb away"<sup>3</sup>—such, indeed, for many years, was to be for Ruskin Rose's death: yet often there were times when he felt her spirit near him more vividly than he had ever done while she had been alive: and himself now cleansed from the sediment of bitterness and anger and

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 428, 430.

<sup>2</sup> *Deucalion: Works*, vol. 26, pp. 333–4.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 18.6.1875: *Works*, vol. 24, p. xx.

frustration that in his earthly dealings with her had always agitated his being.

Spiritualism, which had originated in the United States about 1848, by 1875 had become an interest to many of the most cultivated and intelligent people in England. William and Mary Howitt, Rossetti's old friends, had renounced their Quaker faith for the new universal religion shortly after it had appeared in England; and in 1863 Howitt had published his *History of the Supernatural*. But even before this it had become a major interest in Pre-Raphaelite circles. At seances given by the Howitts and the Homes, Lizzie Siddal had tried to communicate with her dear dead Devereil: and soon after her own death, Rossetti had tried to receive messages from Lizzie by means of the now fashionable table-turning. The strange powers and the even stranger levitations of the medium Home, the genuineness of whose phenomena had been attested by Sir David Brewster, and later satisfied the searching investigations of Sir William Crookes, had early convinced and converted Mrs. Browning, though her husband remained notoriously antagonistic.

At these performances, much of the same irrelevant phenomena occurred with which investigators are familiar to-day. Madox Brown wrote to a friend in April 1868, that at a seance at which Rossetti had been present, flowers were produced from out of the dining-room table and eau de cologne was squirted about in the dark, until Rossetti addressed the spirits by the too familiar appellation of Bogies, and they squirted plain water over the present company and then withdrew. Allingham, who had been persuaded to attend a seance in Lymington the following year, also found it "tiresome nonsense",<sup>1</sup> when a table spelt out futile messages and dodged senselessly about the room.

On other occasions, however, there were more spectacular manifestations. During a seance at which William Rossetti was present, a spirit appeared which called itself Eros and claimed to be the dead Lizzie. Barone Kirkup was convinced that he had spoken with Dante: and at the famous Mrs. Marshall's, William Rossetti and William Bell Scott both believed they had received messages from Lady Trevelyan and from Mrs. Oliphant; while Whistler, at one of the seances which took place at Tudor House, solemnly swore that he had talked with a dead cousin from the South, who had told him much that no one else could have known.

Ruskin had been initiated into these dubious mysteries by Mrs. Cowper-Temple, shortly after his father's death. At one of Home's seances which he had attended, the spirit of Southey was said to be present and to have urged the medium to recite a particular poem, while the table beat time to the rhythm. When this was finished, Ruskin was requested to recite another poem; at which the table

<sup>1</sup> William Allingham: *A Diary*, p. 198.

reversed its action and beat time with a strange metallic sound which Ruskin maintained was representative of the state of mind in which he had learned the verses. There were other manifestations of a somewhat pitiful nature, which Ruskin had evidently regarded, together with subsequent performances, with little more than a polite and good-humoured irony. "On the whole I am much happier for it," he wrote to Mrs. Cowper-Temple, "and very anxious for next time; but there is something also profoundly pitiful, it seems to me, in all that we can conceive of spirits who can't lift a ring without more trouble than Aladdin took to carry his palace, and I suppose you felt that their artistical powers appear decidedly limited. I mean to ask him next time for the spirit of Paul Veronese, and to see whether, if it comes, it can hold a pencil more than an inch long."<sup>1</sup> Evidently Ruskin's request did not meet with conspicuous success, for in another letter, dated 20 April, 1864, he admitted: "I was bored by that tiresome play about whistling the other night—when I wanted to talk to Paul Veronese. They said they would fetch him next night, you know. I don't expect anything very happy from my father—I tell you that in case anything should come—that you may not think it takes me with evil surprise. . . ."<sup>2</sup> But nothing of importance came from John James, and although Home courted Ruskin with his fulsome and characteristic blandishments, Ruskin good-naturedly evaded his advances. In fact, such experiences seem to have done little but spur Ruskin to seek for the truth in other directions: "I am trying to understand what religions have been worth understanding, in some impartial manner—however little of each—" he wrote to Acland at this time: "and as I have strength and time, am endeavouring to make out how far Greeks and Egyptians knew God: or how far anybody ever may hope to know him."<sup>3</sup>

But after Rose's death, the sympathetic and devout Mrs. Cowper-Temple persuaded him to spend much of the autumn with her at Broadlands, where, as he wrote to C. E. Norton, "it is a great relief to me to be where I've nothing to manage, and can go out in the garden without being asked what is to be sown, or cut, or sold, or bought, or burnt, or manured, or drained, or fenced, or carted".<sup>4</sup> Here, for a short time at least, Ruskin became a firm believer. "Heard from Mrs. A. (a society medium who was also of the party) in the drawing-room where I was once so happy, the most overwhelming evidence of the other state of the world that has ever come to me," he noted in his diary on 14 December, "and am this morning like a flint stone suddenly changed into a firefly, and ordered to flutter about in a bramble thicket."<sup>5</sup> And six days later: "Again, first through

<sup>1</sup> Letter undated: *Works*, vol. 18, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 20.4.1864; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Autumn 1864: *Works*, vol. 18, p. xxxiv.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, pp. 121-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Diary*, 14.12.1875: *Works*, vol. 24, p. xxii.

φίλη and her friend, then, conclusively in evening talk after reading, the truth is shown to me, which, though blind, I have truly sought,—so long.”<sup>1</sup> And on the date of the first entry he wrote excitedly to Charles Eliot Norton: “I have heard wonderful things this afternoon. I have seen a person who has herself had the Stigmata and lives as completely in the other world as ever St. Francis did, from her youth up. . . . She had the wounds more than once, but on one occasion conveyed instantly by a relic of St. Catherine of Siena. And I’m as giddy as if I had been thrown off Strasbourg steeple and stopped in the air: but thing after thing of this kind is being brought to me. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

George MacDonald, who paid a short visit to Broadlands before Christmas, wrote on 21 December to his wife: “I have had a little chat with Ruskin. . . . There is a Mrs. A. here. I don’t take to her much, but Ruskin is very interested. . . . She has seen and described, without ever having seen her, Rose whispering to Ruskin. He is convinced.”<sup>3</sup>

When he was back at Brantwood, in letters of 13 January and 1 February he communicated his astonishment once more to C. E. Norton. “At Broadlands either the most horrible lies were told me, without conceivable motive—or the ghost of Rose was seen often beside Mrs. X. or me—which is pleasantest of these things I know, but cannot intellectually say which is likeliest. . . . To me personally, it is no common sign that just after the shade of Rose was asserted to have been seen beside Mrs. T. and beside me, here, I should recover the most precious of the letters she ever wrote me, which, returned when we parted, she nevertheless kept. . . .”<sup>4</sup> This letter, still infinitely precious to him at the end of his days, he carried henceforward always against his heart, carefully preserved between two fine gold plates especially fashioned by a skilled jeweller for the purpose. Her other letters, together with those of his own to her, were tenderly consigned to a rosewood box, which he took with him upon all his future journeys.

Although Ruskin never became a confirmed spiritualist, he later told Holman Hunt that his experiences had re-convinced him of the immortality of the soul; and that although there was much vulgar fraud and stupidity connected with the practice of spiritualism, underneath this there was quite enough to convince him that there was a personal life independent of the body; and, having been thus convinced, he felt no need to pursue his investigations further.

Shortly after Rose thus made her brief re-appearance in the carefully shaded drawing-room at Broadlands, Ruskin began to identify her, not only with Beatrice, but with St. Ursula. The girl whom, in

<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, 20.12.1875: *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, pp. 124-5.

<sup>3</sup> *George MacDonald and His Wife*, p. 472.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, 13.1.1876 and 1.2.1876, vol. 2, pp. 126-9.

life, he had seen, even in the throes of passion, as a morbid or an exasperating little prig, now assumed, in death, a halo that called forth his intense and continual devotion.

"If *anything* is true of what all good and noble Christians have believed, it is true that we not only may, but should pray to the saints, as simply as we should ask them to do anything for us while they were alive," he wrote to Miss Sara Anderson on 17 August, 1876. "Do but feel they *are* alive and love us, and that they had powers of influencing us by their love and wisdom, and what else *can* we do? I should like you to think of Rose as a perfectly pure and innocent friend, who could, and only besought to be permitted to, teach you and inspire you in all things relating to feelings about which you have no other adviser.

"One of your greatest charms to me was your tender hearing of her and your belief in the vision of her. I think it very likely that she may speak to *you*, when she will not to me—or cannot. I cannot tell you why I think this, but I do, very earnestly."<sup>1</sup>

During the September of the same year he went to Venice, where he remained for the following nine months, working for much of the time upon copying Carpaccio's pictures of St. Ursula, which, by means of his usual charm of manner and generosity of purse, he managed to have placed for him in a private room. In a strange, dreamlike silence, he made careful, laborious studies of the face, the hands of the beautiful young saint, and even of the slippers on the floor. And while his assistants were put to work to make copies of the rest of the series, he gave himself up to a prolonged contemplation of her Martyrdom and Funeral, where the girl lay so lifelike and serene in death, that sometimes in the intense stillness of the dusk, he hardly dared to breathe lest he should waken her. Slowly, subtly, she invaded his tired brain, until sometimes he must struggle to disengage reality from dream.

During this period, Lady Castletown, a gracious Irish lady who was then in Venice, had sent him a pot of dianthus—"the flower of God"<sup>2</sup>—such as Carpaccio had painted on the sill of St. Ursula's bedroom: and this Ruskin immediately accepted as a significant omen. "Last night St. Ursula sent me her dianthus out of her bedroom window with her love," he wrote in *Fors* on Christmas Day. "She sent me the living dianthus (with a little personal message besides, of great importance to *me*) by the hands of an Irish friend now staying here: but she had sent me also a dried sprig of the other flower in her window, the sacred vervain."<sup>3</sup>

And in *Fors*, with all his thoughts still of Rose, he told St. Ursula's sad and noble story: told of the saintly girl who, at fifteen, was not

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 17.8.1876: *Works*, vol. 24, p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 24, p. xliv.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 74; *Works*, vol. 29, p. 30.

only the glass of beauty, but the light of wisdom, and a fountain of scripture and of sweet ways; whose speech was so full of all delight that it seemed as though an angel of paradise had taken human flesh; who would not accept her lover until he had become converted to the Living Truth; who asked her suitor for leave to postpone her marriage for three years; and who, in her saintliness, went unmarried to God wearing in triumph a martyr's crown. "Never was twisted hair like hers—twisted, like that of all Venetian girls, in memory of the time when they first made their hair into ropes for the fugitive ships at Aquileia. You will never see such hair, nor such peace beneath it on the brow—*Pax Vobiscum*—the peace of heaven, of infancy, and of death. No one knows who she is or where she lived. She is Persephone at rest below the earth; she is Proserpine at play above the ground. She is Ursula, the gentlest and the rudest of little bears; a type in that, perhaps, of the moss rose, or of the rose *spinosissima*, with its rough little buds. She is in England, in Cologne, in Venice, in Rome, in eternity, living everywhere, dying everywhere, the most intangible yet the most practical of all saints—queen, for one thing, of female education, when once her legend is rightly understood. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In his imagination she dwelt constantly, now as St. Ursula, now as Beatrice, now as the sweet and wayward girl that he had known in life. Often he dreamed that Lady Mount Temple had sent him a letter from her. "Eleven years then, to-day, I have waited," he wrote in his diary on 2 February in Venice in the spring of 1877. "How wonderful, the slow sadness! yet so fast! How weary the three seemed, half over, the eleven, what a dream! . . . Dreaming of pictures by Rose in sweet mosaic colour, of signs from her; but all confused and vague in waiting. I recollect saying as I looked at the drawing, 'Ah, what a creature lost'. I did not mean to myself, but to the world."<sup>2</sup>

And in February of the following year, when the power of his noble intellect was first quenched by a long dream, it was of the inextricably mixed up Rose-St. Ursula that he had been thinking. Now, indeed, St. Ursula had become Rose herself; no longer the lovely dead girl he had copied lying with serene beauty upon her bier: but the lovely living girl whom he had sat beside at Broadlands; the lovely, living, evasive girl who for ten long years he had hoped passionately might become his wife. And now, when dreams had encroached upon the real world so that his consciousness was governed no longer by external facts, at last he was able to remould life nearer to the heart's desire.

In a dream that was no dream, he saw the lovely maiden resurrected. Tall, and calm, and dressed in white, she was walking up the aisle

<sup>1</sup> Lecture "The Pleasures of Truth" of 15-17.11.1884: *Works*, vol. 33, p. 507.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, 2.2.1877: *Works*, vol. 35, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.

of a church, while he, her bridegroom, was waiting for her, trembling with excitement, at the altar steps. And there, in the church, were faces that he knew—a vast sea of faces from which he could detach one only—William Cowper-Temple's, which was smiling at him with confidence and encouragement. Then, as the notes of the organ swelled, he suddenly heard the barking of his dog Bruno, ecstatic at his master's happiness; and the next moment Rose had reached his side and the service had begun.

"Dear George," he wrote that day to George MacDonald (he had never addressed him as George before), "we've got married—after all after all—but such a surprise!—Tell the Brown Mother, and Lily.

"Bruno's out of his wits with joy up at the Chartreuse Grande—and so am I, for that matter—I meant—but I'm in an awful hurry, such a lot of things to do—

"Just get this done before Breakfast—the fourth letter. Ever your lovingest, John Ruskin. Oh Willie—Willie—He's pleased too, George dear!"<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, on 4 March, Mrs. Severn, to whom he had immediately written, wrote to George MacDonald of Ruskin's breakdown. "I am grieved to tell you," she said, "that our darling Coz. has been, and is, most dangerously ill—no doubt from overwork—His letter to you was written when the first failure of strength began. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

"The Doctors say it was overwork and worry," Ruskin himself wrote to C. E. Norton on 23 July, when he had recovered, "which is partly true and partly not. *Mere* overwork and worry might have soon ended me, but it would not have driven me crazy. I went crazy about St. Ursula and the other saints—and rather suppose I had offended the less pretty *Fors Atropos*, till she lost her temper. But the doctors know nothing either of St. Ursula or St. Kate, or St. Læchesis—and not much else of anything worth knowing. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

And though, now and often afterwards, Ruskin could regard his tragic aberrations with a complete and lucid detachment, Rose, in one form or another, never ceased to haunt him until his death.

## 4

Ruskin's first serious mental illness of 1878 had not, however, been caused solely by memories of Rose, although these were undoubtedly the chief contributory factor. He was simultaneously torn with anger and chagrin at the thanklessness of all his work. "After the seventh year," he had written in the last *Fors* of the previous year,

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 21.2.1878, from Brantwood; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 4.3.[1878], from Brantwood; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 23.7.1878: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 252.

"I am going out into the highways and hedges; but no more with expostulation. I have wearied myself in the fire enough; and now, under the wild roses and traveller's joy of the bare hedges, will take what rest may be in my pilgrimage."<sup>1</sup>

He was, moreover, bitterly grieved by the attitude of some of his old friends. "All alike, in whom I had most trusted for help," he wrote in bitter grief, "failed me in this main work: some mocked at it, some pitied, some rebuked—all stopped their ears at the cry; and the solitude at last became too great to be endured."<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas Acland and William Cowper Temple had both resigned their joint Trusteeship of St. George's Fund shortly before; and now he was deeply vexed by the attitude of Octavia Hill, who, despite the fact that it was he who had made possible her valuable social experiments, had never shown the slightest interest in his Guild of St. George, and who was now misrepresented to Ruskin as having told some person likely to be interested that Ruskin was quite incompetent to conduct any practical enterprise successfully. By now, the word of Octavia Hill carried no little weight. Her work, to which she devoted the whole energies of a rich vitality and a generous spirit, had prospered, and the girl who had believed that no one would ever hear of what she did had already become something of a public figure. In 1868, she had associated herself with Ruskin in organising a society known as *The London Association for the Prevention of Pauperization and Crime* (later known as the *Charity Organisation Society*), to which Ruskin had contributed two thirds of the expenses: in 1875, when the Artisans' Dwelling Bill was passed, Octavia Hill's experiences had been consulted by all those who were most interested in its success; and many useful amendments had been incorporated on her advice. But by now her path and Ruskin's were clearly divergent. "I cannot help in this more than with sympathy and good hope," he had written her in July 1875. "There is no reason for your doubting either of these in me, for all you have done and are designing—but my work is now, and must be, totally in another kind; not as you put it, that I want perfection, while you are content with the immediate possible—but that while your work is only mitigating of mortal pain, mine is radically curative. . . ."<sup>3</sup> "I shall read your book with true pleasure," he had written again a few months later—"understand, of course, how much your work is your own—but not feeling it therefore—either separate from mine or derived from it, but contributing—mine and yours alike to the stream of the great River of Life. . . ."<sup>4</sup> From Venice, in February 1877, he had written her another letter even more appreciative. "I have your beautiful letter with account of donations in print, and am greatly delighted with it. You will find

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 84: *Work*, vol. 29, pp. 293-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 88: *ibid.*, pp. 386-7.

<sup>3</sup> E. S. Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 188.



yourself, without working for it, taking a position in the literary, no less than in the philanthropic, world. It seems to me not improbable that the great powers and interests you are now exciting in so many minds, will indeed go on from the remedial to the radical cure of social evils: and that you have been taking the right method of attack all along."<sup>1</sup>

But in 1878, in his then dangerously susceptible mental state, to have her apparently turn against him had aroused his utmost bitterness and indignation; and he had immediately asked the woman who had been told the story herself to write to Octavia Hill to ascertain exactly what she had said. To this letter Octavia Hill replied that there had evidently been some misapprehension regarding her words, and that she did not feel called upon to enter into a correspondence with a stranger about Ruskin, or to explain for a stranger's benefit any private conversation of her own.

Ruskin, infuriated by this evasion, thereupon wrote to Octavia Hill himself: and her reply, which, together with the whole correspondence, he published in *Fors*, was a model of dignity and affection. . . . "If *you* like to know anything I ever said, or thought, about you, for the twenty-four years I have known you," she told him, most explicitly, "you shall know; and you will find no trace of any thought, much less word, that was not utterly loyal, and even reverently tender towards you. . . . I have lived very far from you, but has there been thought or deed of mine uncoloured by the influence of the early, the abiding, and the continuous teaching you gave me? Have I not striven to carry out what you have taught in the place where I have been called to live? Was there a moment when I would not have served you joyfully at any cost? Ask those who know, if, when you have failed or pained me, I have not invariably said, if I said anything, that you might have good reasons of which I knew nothing, or might have difficulties I could not understand; or that you had so much sorrow in your life, that if it was easier to you to act thus or thus in ways affecting me, so far as I was concerned I was glad you should freely choose the easier. . . .

"I remember nothing of what I *said*, but distinctly what I *thought* and think, and will write that to you if you care. . . ." To this letter Ruskin replied with characteristic pertinacity that "it was very pretty, but that he still wanted to know, as far as possible, exactly what she had said, or was in the habit of saying."

To this Octavia Hill replied courageously, frankly, and at length: "I have spoken to you, I think, and certainly to others, of what appears to me an incapacity in you for management of great practical work,—due, in my opinion, partly to an ideal standard of perfection, which finds it hard to accept *any* limitations in perfection, even temporarily; partly to a strange power of gathering round you, and

<sup>1</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, pp. 348-9.

trusting, the wrong people, which I could never understand in you, as it mingles so strangely with rare powers of perception of character, and which always seemed to me therefore rather a deliberate ignoring of qualifications, in hope that that would stimulate to better actions, but which hope was not realised. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's answer to this indicates clearly enough not only how deeply he was wounded, but the precarious state of his over-excited mind, from which ideas of Rose and "that accursed woman at Perth" could not, even temporarily, be excluded. . . . "Your opinions of me are perhaps of little moment to *me*, but of immense moment to others," he declared. "But for this particular opinion, that I trust the wrong people, I wish you to give me *two* sufficient examples of the error you have imagined. You yourself will be a notable third; and at the mouth of two or three witnesses, the word will be established.

"But as I never yet, to my own knowledge, 'trusted' anyone who has failed me, *except* yourself and one other person of whom I do not suppose you are thinking, I shall be greatly instructed if you will give me the two instances I ask for. . . . Of all injuries you could have done—not me—but the cause I have in hand, the giving the slightest countenance to the vulgar mob's cry of 'impractical' was the fatallest."

At might have been expected, Octavia Hill's reply to this was a refusal to discuss the matter further; but Ruskin, declining to be balked, continued to press her to give names, and made clear his intention to publish the entire correspondence if she refused. But she did refuse, and pointed out that she strongly disapproved of publication, which would only create a false impression of their dissension and be injurious, not to her, but to himself.

As what he considered to be an explicit conclusion to the matter, Ruskin ended his publication of their correspondence with the copy of a most eulogious letter Octavia Hill had sent him two years before, in which she generously admitted her deep obligation to his teaching and influence, and his practical aid, for all that she had been able to do. Finally, he made clear his hope that this dissension, no matter how much it may have wounded and even injured him, would not in any way terminate their practical relations. "Miss Hill will, I hope," he declared, "retain the administration of the Marylebone houses as long as she is inclined, making them, by her zealous and disinterested service, as desirable and profitable a possession to the Guild as hitherto to me. It is always to be remembered that she has acted as the administrator of this property, and paid me five per cent upon it regularly,—entirely without salary, and in pure kindness to the tenants. My own part in the work was in taking five instead of ten per cent, which the houses would have been made to pay to another landlord; and in pledging myself neither to sell the property nor raise

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 86: *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 355-8.

the rents—thus enabling Miss Hill to assure the tenants of peace in their homes, and encourage every effort in the improvement of them. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Although this painful dissension was due chiefly to the mischievous interference of a third party, it is understandable enough that Ruskin, on the one hand, should have resented bitterly what must have seemed like the most grievous disloyalty on the part of a friend the whole of whose work would have been impossible had it not been for his ready understanding and sympathy and his practical aid: and how, on the other hand, to an essentially practical nature like Octavia Hill's, the very scale of Ruskin's intended reforms should place them in the melancholy realm of Utopian dreams.

## 5

Yet despite the charges of unpracticalness so frequently levelled at him even by those who held him in the highest esteem, in comparison with Carlyle, who did nothing but volley and thunder his resonant fulminations, both in character and in action Ruskin was practical to an unusual degree. And it is curious that a whole section of the community who could have achieved nothing but the making of money in some position demanding few qualities other than an innate shrewdness, were as a matter of course considered practical, while a man like Ruskin who could not only do skilled research, but could write books, make exquisite drawings, engrave, catalogue collections, teach enthusiastic classes, lecture, establish drawing schools and museums, to say nothing of being able to work with his own hands at bricklaying, plastering or log chopping, acquired a reputation for being completely the reverse. Even by the standards of the most vulgar, to whom “practical” connotes little but the capacity to make money, Ruskin was a very practical man indeed; and that he did not amass a huge fortune was determined by nothing but the fact that he already believed that he had a good deal more of the world's goods than he was entitled to. The fact that he had the capacity to do so is evident enough from his experiment at publishing.

Until 1870, when his works were still in the hands of Smith, Elder & Co., one of the most reputable publishers of the day, allowing for the huge sums that both he and his father in one way or another sank in their production, Ruskin could have made but little profit from his books. They had enjoyed, from the beginning, a considerable *succès d'estime*, but they had never sold particularly well: and indeed, after his entry into the arena of political economy, his publishers seem to have been quite satisfied to let them lie about on shelves from one year to another.

But when, in the early 'seventies, Ruskin decided to manage his

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 360.

publishing in his own way, all this very soon changed. The original firm of Smith, Elder had dissolved in 1868; and although the new firm of the same name continued to print for him for some years; when he decided to re-issue a collected edition of his works in 1871, Ruskin, by making George Allen his business manager, determined to undertake the distribution and selling of his books himself. His original intention had been to publish on his own account only his new works, and to sell the copyright, at least of all his early works upon art, to Smith, Elder: but the figure they offered him (£2,500) was so unsatisfactory that he rejected it and proposed henceforward to keep the publication of everything in his own hands. His methods were efficient, autocratic, and surprisingly successful: and though, at first, they occasioned a strident and embittered outcry amongst the booksellers, they eventually procured for him, at the period when he had dissipated nearly the whole of his paternal fortune, a handsome income such as he would never have obtained had he adhered to more orthodox methods.

Ruskin's first venture in the Revised and Enlarged Edition of his Collected Works, the new issue of *Sesame and Lilies* which appeared in 1871, disclosed his revolutionary intentions both to the public and the book trade. "It has long been in my mind to make some small beginning of resistance to the existing system of irregular discount in the bookselling trade," he declared in an advertisement—"not in hostility to booksellers, but, as I think they will find eventually, with a just regard to their interest, as well as to that of authors. Every volume of this series of my collected works will be sold to the trade only; who can then fix such further profit on it, as they deem fitting, for retail.

"Every volume will be clearly printed and thoroughly well bound; on such conditions the price to the public, allowing full profit to the retailer, may sometimes reach, but ought never to exceed, half a guinea, nor do I wish it to be less. . . . The price of this first volume to the trade is seven shillings."<sup>1</sup>

This arrangement, however, soon proved unsatisfactory at a time when books could be bartered over the counters of reputable booksellers like second-hand bric-a-brac; and the following year he sternly decreed that, although the new series of his works would not all be worth exactly the same, he did not care that those should read his books who grudged him a doctor's fee per volume, and that he therefore intended to fix a uniform retail price of half a guinea for those without plates, and a guinea for those that were illustrated. "I find, in the present state of trade," he continued, "that when the retail price is printed on books, all sorts of commissions and abatements take place, to the discredit of the author, and I am convinced, in the end, to everyone's disadvantage. I mean, therefore, to sell my

<sup>1</sup> *Sesame and Lilies: Works*, vol. 18, p. 10.

own books, at a price from which there shall be no abatement; namely, 9s. 6d. the plain volumes, and 19s. the illustrated ones."<sup>1</sup> Unlike Tolstoy, Ruskin had always desired that his books should be expensive. "Nay, I will even go so far as to say that we ought not to get books too cheaply," he had written years before in *A Joy for Ever*. "No book, I believe, is ever worth half so much to its reader as one that has been coveted for a year at a bookstall, and bought out of saved halfpence; and perhaps a day or two's fasting. That's the way to get the cream of a book. And I should say no more on this matter, and protest as energetically as I could against the plague of cheap literature, with which we are just now afflicted, but that I fear you calling me to order for being impractical, because I don't quite see my way at present to making everybody fast for their books. But one may see that a thing is desirable and possible, even though one may not at once know the best way to it,—and in my Island of Barataria, when I get it well in order, I assure you no book shall be sold for less than a pound sterling . . . only really poor people, who cannot pay the pound, shall be supplied with the books they want for nothing, in a certain limited quantity."<sup>2</sup> His books were now to be obtained, on these conditions, either of Smith, Elder & Co. or the author's agent, George Allen. But this arrangement lasted only a short time, and at the beginning of 1874 yet another advertisement was issued, in which—although Ruskin feared that few illustrated volumes would be issued, as the trouble and difficulties of revising the text and preparing the plates were far greater than he had anticipated—the prices were raised to 20s. and 30s. respectively. Later, further alterations were made in the proposed prices, and the books were to be obtained, by public and booksellers alike, for cash only, from no one but Allen, at his premises at Orpington, who had the author's "positive orders to attend to no letter requesting either credit or abatement". "I hope in time," the notice continued, "that the system may be adopted by other authors and that the public may gradually see its reasonableness, and pay their ten per cent, justly and openly, to the retail bookseller. How much more than ten per cent he takes from them, at present, by concealment or equivocation, they may judge by observing the eagerness of his endeavour to hinder the sales of these books on the terms conceded to him."<sup>3</sup>

Since the discount allowed by the publisher to the bookseller was usually one-third of the announced selling price, by this means, even if he slightly reduced the number of sales, Ruskin obtained a far higher scale of royalties, and earned for himself not only the usual profits of publisher and author, but part of the profits of the bookseller in addition.

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 14: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 257 n.

<sup>2</sup> *A Joy for Ever*: *Works*, vol. 16, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 18, p. 11.

And though many booksellers tried to boycott his works, and the trade circular announced contemptuously that he had transferred his publishing to the middle of a country field, both the demand for them and the number of his publications steadily increased, until Allen became one of the successful and accredited publishers of the day, and the business absorbed both his son and his daughter and a considerable staff besides. Indeed, twelve years after the whole of his publishing business had been put by Ruskin into Allen's hands, the author was earning several thousand pounds a year in royalties; and between 1886 and 1889, the new edition of *The Stones of Venice* alone had brought him in over £3,000. Though these figures are modest enough in comparison with the successful novelists of the day, some of whom commanded advances on account of royalties as high as £10,000; and are but a tithe of the £40,000 a year that Millais had assured the Prince of Wales he could easily make a year were he not to allow himself a four months' holiday, they are certainly high for a purely didactic writer of discursive nature whose works require considerable attention, and often effort, to read.

But Ruskin believed that the labourer is worthy of his hire: and had no hesitation in declaring the fact to those who complained either of the difficulty of obtaining his books from libraries, or their high prices. "If I thought it good for you to have my books cheap, you should have them cheap or for nothing," he explained to one such correspondent . . . "but please remember the profits told you are made by a man of sixty-eight after a hard life's work—just as he is dying. How many people do you suppose there are, making ten times that profit on other people's work, to whose gain nobody objects, and who are never asked to waive their profits to oblige anybody?"

"That my books are not in your libraries is the fault of your general teachers, and of those very swindlers who want to bring you up in their swindling trades.

"And it is your fault also, because you ask for cheap sensation and gratis good-for-nothing books, instead of working to have what is best at its fair price, which it is perfectly in your power to do if you will."<sup>1</sup>

On other occasions, though no less brusque, Ruskin would be more generous. "I have ordered my publisher to send you in gift a book of mine you have not read," he told another correspondent who had also complained about the high prices of his works. "Be content with that, at present, and Carlyle. Have you not Shakespeare, cheap? and the Bible nowadays for nothing? What good do they do you?"<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, though he "disliked his books more than most authors",<sup>3</sup> Ruskin was always extremely jealous as to their manner of production.

<sup>1</sup> *Tit-Bits*, issue of 5.12.1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Arrows of the Cross*, letter of 4.11.1884: *Works*, vol. 34, p. 576.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 8.2.1899.

Nor had he any sympathy for the American piracy of the works of English authors in his day. When an Englishman wrote to solicit his help over an American edition of his books that had been sent him and seized by the Customs, Ruskin curtly replied: "Sir, I do not see that your friend's desire to give you a present at my expense is any apology for your intrusion upon me;"<sup>1</sup> while when he was asked, on another occasion, by George Allen himself, to sanction the import of an American edition for a famous traveller, his decision was no less unequivocal. "Mr. — had much better not burden himself with stolen property on his missionary expedition," he declared. "He shall certainly not do so with permission of mine."<sup>2</sup>

## 6

But his unfortunate dissension with Octavia Hill was not the only expression of Ruskin's tragic mental instability at this time, for only a few months before he had published in *Fora* the fierce and injudicious critique of Whistler, on account of which the painter soon brought an action against him for libel. Few law cases in the art world achieved more notoriety, or did more harm to both participants, and to the cause of art, which both participants professed to desire to serve, than that of Whistler *v.* Ruskin. It was one of those tragic cases of misunderstanding in which two men who inherently possessed much in common, and the material for a mutual appreciation, both permitted the passing irritation of exacerbated egotism to provoke them into ill-judged action that proved disastrous to each.

The apparent aggressor in this battle of principles and battle of words was certainly Ruskin. Back from Italy, in the summer of 1877, with his mind already agitated to an alarming extent, partly by disease and partly by the calamitous sense of the destruction of a whole world of beauty and significance that he was ultimately powerless to save, he had of course visited the loan exhibition at the Grosvenor Galleries which had been opened by Sir Coutts Lindsay some weeks previously, and had since enjoyed the patronage of Royalty and the publicity afforded by the presence of the fashionable world.

His aim in opening the Grosvenor Gallery, which had been specially built to fulfil the desired requirements, was to supply an alternative to the Royal Academy, where works would not be excluded by reason of originality, and where they could be displayed to advantage with a reasonable margin of space all round. Lighting and arrangement were to have the most careful attention, and admission was to be by private invitation only, those painters who received the distinction themselves deciding how many of their works should be hung. Of all the artists invited to participate, Rossetti was the only one,

<sup>1</sup> *The Independent*, 11.5.1899.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 30, p. 362.

**XXIX. PORTRAIT OF WHISTLER, BY HIMSELF**





XXX. JOHN RUSKIN, 1882

*From a steel engraving by W. Roffe*

in accordance with the habit of years, who declined to exhibit. "The general effect of the great rooms was most beautiful and quite unlike the ordinary picture gallery," W. Graham Robertson wrote years later. "It suggested the interior of some old Venetian palace, and the pictures, hung well apart from each other against dim rich brocades and amongst fine pieces of antique furniture, showed to unusual advantage. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Such at least was the theory. In actual fact, there were others who felt that the elaborate decor of the gallery, verging upon ostentation, defeated the very purpose it was intended to serve, and merely detracted from the beauty of the pictures. Here, at any rate, against a background of crimson damask and green velvet hangings, surrounded by the highly finished and familiar subjects of the now celebrated Burne-Jones, Millais, Alma Tadema, Leighton, Teynter and Richmond, to Ruskin the works by Whistler appeared gularly eccentric and inappropriate.

Here they hung—*Nocturne in Black and Gold* (the *Falling Rocket* which had been shown previously at the Dudley); *Harmony in Amber and Black* (the first title of the *Fur Jacket*); *Arrangement in Brown*; *Arrangement in Black no. III* (portrait of Irving as Philip II of Spain); two *Nocturnes in Blue and Silver* (one of which was changed later by Whistler to *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*), *Old Battersea Bridge*; a *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*, and the *Portrait of Carlyle*, which had arrived too late for its title to be included in the catalogue—and hitherto by the public they had been elaborately ignored. Not so, however, by the critics, who had exercised themselves as usual, in trying to amuse their readers with condescending sneers at a style of painting that was still, in England, generally misunderstood. The *Athenaeum* had paid but little attention to this "whimsical, if capable artist and his vagaries"; but *The Times* had been entertaining over "Mr. Whistler's compartment, musical with strange nocturnes"; had commiserated with him upon a theory, the practice of which involved "an entire absence of details, even details generally considered so important to a full length portrait as arms and legs"; and had concluded that his full length arrangement "suggests to us a choice between materialised spirits and figures in a London fog".

Ruskin, whose eye fell first upon the *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, was outraged by this production. It must be remembered that Ruskin had never admired Whistler's works. For long he had considered them affected in title and careless in execution. Already in one of his Oxford Lectures (*Val d'Arno III*) he had castigated the "absolute rubbish professing to be a harmony in pink and white"<sup>2</sup> which had taken about a quarter of an hour to scrawl or daub—it had no pretence to be called painting. The price asked for it was two hundred and fifty guineas. So great, indeed, was his distrust of

<sup>1</sup> W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 23, p. 49.

Whistler as a serious artist, that although Whistler had indirectly solicited his acquaintance several years before, Ruskin had declined to meet him. The overture had been made through Swinburne, who had then recently been introduced to Ruskin by Lady Trevelyan. He had lately been at Whistler's studio, and so enchanted by the *Little White Girl* that there and then he had composed *Before the Mirror, Verses under a Picture*—which verses were printed on gold paper and pasted by the gratified but deprecating Whistler upon the picture frame—and had afterwards, on 11 August, 1865, written to Ruskin to inform him of his success. "Since writing the verses (which were literally improvised and taken down on paper one Sunday morning after breakfast) I have been told more than once, and especially by Gabriel Rossetti, that they were better than the subject. Three or four days ago I had the good fortune to be able to look well over the picture, which alone put them into my head, and came to the conclusion, which I had drawn at first, that whatever merit my song may have, it is not so complete in beauty, in tenderness and significance, in exquisite execution and delicate strength, as Whistler's picture. Whistler was the first critic who so far overpraised my verse as to rank it above his own painting. I stood up against him for himself, and will, of course, against all others.

"I am going to take Jones (unless I hear from Whistler to the contrary) on Sunday next in the afternoon to W.'s studio. I wish you could accompany us. Whistler (as any artist worthy of his rank must be) is of course desirous to meet you, and to let you see his immediate work. As (I think) he has never met you, you will see that his desire to have it out with you face to face must spring simply from knowledge and appreciation of your own works."<sup>1</sup>

This letter suggests that even so long ago there had been some expressed criticism on one side or the other; but there is no evidence as to what it was. We know only that Ruskin did not comply with Swinburne's suggestion; and that he did not do so out of any lack of valuation of the young poet. For to C. E. Norton he wrote early the following year: "Have you read Swinburne's *Atalanta*? The grandest thing ever yet done by a youth, though he is a Demonic youth. Whether ever he will be clothed and in his right mind, heaven only knows. His foam at the mouth is fine, meanwhile."<sup>2</sup> And to another friend: "He is infinitely above me in knowledge and power, and I should no more think of advising or criticising him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again."<sup>3</sup>

Probably Ruskin disliked and distrusted Whistler's self-advertisement—the fashionable Sunday breakfasts, the brilliant epigrams, the complacent rapier thrusts at all his friends. It was Dégas who said

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 11.8.1865: *Works*, vol. 36, pp. xlviii–xlix.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 28.1.1866: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 501.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 14.9.1866: *Works*, vol. 36, p. xlix.

of Whistler that he "behaved as if he had no genius"; and everything has to be paid for—even playing the mountebank to amuse oneself at the expense of fashionable fools. And Whistler had so cultivated the habits of the mountebank that very early they had ceased to be a cloak assumed at will. Once when at the bar of a seaside inn, he saw the landlord watching him with covert interest, the painter had asked the man whom he believed him to be. "I can't say exactly, sir, but I should fancy you was from the 'Alls." If others besides the publican felt the same, Whistler had no one but himself to blame.

Anyhow, the two men had never met; and, knowing all too well the months of careful toil which must usually go to the painting of a saleable picture, Ruskin was particularly irritated by the substantial price asked for this dubious experiment. Beginning with a cogent attack upon the whole exhibition, in the July number of *Fors* Ruskin explained that "it has been planned and is directed by a gentleman in the true desire to help artists and better the art of his country:—not as a commercial speculation. Since in this main condition it is right, I hope success for it, but in very many secondary matters it must be set on a different footing before its success can be sure. . . . Sir Coutts Lindsay is at present an amateur both in art and shop-keeping. He must take up either one or the other business, if he would prosper in either. If he intends to manage the Grosvenor Gallery rightly, he must not put his own works in it till he can answer for their quality; if he means to be a painter, he must not at present superintend the erection of public buildings, or amuse himself with their decoration by china and upholstery. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Then, suddenly descending to the works themselves, he averred: "For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill educated conceit of the artist so nearly approaches the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of cockney impudence before now: but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." <sup>2</sup>

This was Ruskin at his most arrogant and astrigent; yet there is a curious similarity in his invective and the invective which had so deeply incensed him in his youth when it had been wantonly flung at Turner. More curious, perhaps, his own blindness to the similarity of intention in the old painter who had commanded his fanatical allegiance, and the new one who had aroused his eloquent contempt. Yet his attack was certainly no fiercer than those frequently made in journalistic art criticism: it was no fiercer than had, in the past, been made against Turner; it was no fiercer than that which such eminent men as Dickens had, in their early years, made upon the young Millais and Hunt.

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 79; *Works*, vol. 29, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 160.

Certainly Whistler should have had the wit to see this. But Whistler was one of those who, while enjoying nothing so much as insolence at the expense of others, felt himself unwarrantably persecuted when similar treatment was meted to himself. In fact, despite his great industry and his greater talents, Whistler's career as a painter had so far been—as he himself was to put it so wittily later in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*—"the succès d'exécration—the only tribute possible from the Mob to the Master".<sup>1</sup>

The first exponent of impressionism in England, he had gloried in his spectacular reaction from the mid-Victorian subject picture. "Each man was afraid his subject might be stolen," he would declare with delighted suavity to his companions. "And at last, on Varnishing Day, there was the subject in all its glory—wonderful. The British subject! Like a flash the inspiration came—The Inventor! And in the Academy there you saw him: the familiar model—the soldier or the Italian—and there he sat, hands on knees, head bent, brows knit, eyes staring, in a corner, angles and cogwheels and things; close to him, his wife, cold, ragged, the baby in her arms; he had failed! The story was told. It was as clear as day—amazing! The British subject! What!"

It was in this milieu of "British subjects" that Whistler had exhibited *At the Piano* in 1860. But while many of his etchings had shown a precision of treatment that had first won the admiration of William Rossetti; methods so unorthodox as his in composition and the application of paint had, where they had not encountered cold indifference, aroused little but a condescending derision. This was only increased upon the exhibition of the *White Girl*. Rejected by the Royal Academy in 1862, it had been shown later at the Berners Street Gallery, where it was generally considered to be the joke of the season. In Paris it had fared even worse. For the following year when, having been refused by the Salon, it was hung in the famous Salon des Refusés, it even surpassed Manet's *Le Bain* (now known as *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*) as an object of derision. Zola in *L'Œuvre* has described the wanton stupidity and the callous cruelty of the crowd, as it singled out *La Dame en Blanc* as the object for displays of insolent comment and brutish laughter. Even after a further ten years of hard work, Whistler had enjoyed but little better success with the orthodox; and in 1872 his portrait of his mother had found place in the Academy exhibition, having first been refused under the title *Arrangement in Grey and Black*, only because Sir William Boxall had threatened to resign from the Council if it were not hung. Thus years of lack of appreciation had educated to its highest pitch the natural belligerence upon which he had always prided himself, and which Rossetti had good-humouredly made the subject of one of his most amusing limericks:

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 107.

"There's a combative Artist named Whistler  
 Who is, like his own hog-hairs, a bristler.  
 A tube of white lead  
 And a punch on the head  
 Offer varied attractions to Whistler."

Now, coming upon Ruskin's attack one day at his club, it was suggested to him by an acquaintance that it was possibly libellous, as a result of which he immediately sought legal aid and decided to take action. Thus the righteous indignation at harsh criticism of a man who would airily remark: "Manet did very good work, of course, but then Manet was always l'écologiste—the student with a certain sense of things to paint," or—comparing Turner with Claude—"Turner must paint nothing less than the sun, and he sticks on a blob of paint—let us be thankful that it isn't a red wafer, as in some of his other pictures—and there isn't any illusion whatever and the Englishman lifts up his head in ecstatic conceit with the English painter, who alone has dared to do what no artist would be fool enough to attempt."

When Ruskin heard of the challenge, no less belligerent than Whistler, he rose to it with a similar assumption of injured innocence. Evidently William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones had offered spontaneously to support him in court, for he wrote to Burne-Jones later that summer: "Darling Ned,—You're a couple of darlings, Morris and you—and perhaps I may want you, but I don't think so. It's mere nuts and nectar to me the notion of having to answer for myself in court, and the whole thing will enable me to assert some principles of art economy which I've never got into the public's head, by writing, but may get sent over all the world vividly in a newspaper report or two.

"Meantime I've heard nothing of the matter yet, and am only afraid the fellow will be better advised."<sup>1</sup>

Thus far, it seems, the case of Whistler *v.* Ruskin was to be a crusade on either side. Whistler proposed to champion the cause of the painter against professional critics, Ruskin to justify his long misunderstood principles of the *raison d'être* of art. Each imagined that some decisive victory was to be won: each was equally and tragically mistaken.

The action of Whistler *v.* Ruskin was heard, after an interval of over a year, on 25-26 November, 1878. Ruskin, meantime, had been disastrously ill, and able to give the matter neither thought nor preparation, though on 2 November he had written to Burne-Jones: "I gave your name to the blessed lawyers, as chief of men to whom they might refer for anything which in their wisdom they can't discern unaided concerning me. But I commanded them in no wise and for no cause whatsoever to trouble or tease you; and neither in your case nor in that of any other artist, to think themselves justified

<sup>1</sup> Letter of August 1877, *Works*, vol. 37, p. 225.

in asking more than may enable them to state the case with knowledge and distinctness."<sup>1</sup>

Whistler, however, was able to do both, and did them in characteristic style. Brilliant epigrams went the round. Ruskin was a man whom "political economists called a great art critic, and artists considered a great political economist". His fellow artists doubtless gave the expected tribute of a smile; but they were far from anxious to be impressed into the support of Whistler's cause. Charles Keene, whom Whistler considered to be the greatest artist since Hogarth, wrote to a friend on the eve of the trial: "Whistler's case against Ruskin comes off, I believe, on Monday. He wants to subpoena me as a witness as to whether he is (as Ruskin says) an impostor or not. I told him I should be glad to record my opinion, but begged him to do without me if he could." Keene was not the only one who showed reluctance in Whistler's support. Whistler assured his friends that he had letters from Leighton, the President of the Royal Academy; from Burton, Director of the National Gallery, and from Poynter, then Director for Art at South Kensington, testifying to the artistic merit of his nocturnes; but none of them would permit these assurances to be produced as evidence in court.

The trial itself, during which Ruskin was obsessed with a truculent bravado ("I believe the comic Whistler trial is to be decided to-day,"<sup>2</sup> he wrote to Norton on 26 November, and a few days later to George Allen, "Comic enough, the whole trial, the public may think—but I'll make them remember it, or my name's not mine"<sup>3</sup>)—was a tragic-comedy played before an audience so packed that even the passages were filled. It was tried before Baron Huddleston; Ruskin had briefed the Attorney General, Sir John Holker, and Mr. (afterwards Lord) Bowen for his defence; Whistler, the famous Serjeant Parry. Whistler himself went into the box, and called as experts Albert Moore, William Rossetti and W. G. Wells. Ruskin was upheld by Burne-Jones, Frith and Tom Taylor, the critics. Whistler's counsel declared that the terms used of him by Ruskin were "unfair and ungentlemanly, and were calculated to do, and had done, him in his professional reputation considerable injury entitling him to damages";<sup>4</sup> and Ruskin's defence was that his words had been uttered in good faith and were legitimate criticism. Ruskin had lived a long life without being attacked, his counsel pleaded. No one could say that he had purchased his praise, and no one had attempted to restrain his pen through the medium of the jury. Mr. Ruskin did not retract one syllable of his criticism upon Mr. Whistler's pictures. He believed he was right. For nearly all his life he had devoted himself to criticism for the sake of the art he loved, and he asked the jury

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 26.11.1878: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, issue of 26.11.1878.

not now to paralyse his hand. If they gave a verdict against him, he must cease to write. It would be an evil day for the art of this country if Mr. Ruskin were prevented from indulging in proper and legitimate criticism, and pointing out what was beautiful and what was not, and if critics were all reduced to a dead level of forced and fulsome adulation.

Many present must have been embarrassed by divided loyalties. Arthur Severn, for example, who was in court in Ruskin's interest, and who had seen Whistler paint *The Last of Old Westminster* from the sitting-room of his brother's flat, and rather sympathised with him: Burne-Jones, who, despite his convictions and the fact that examples of his own work had been selected by Ruskin to press home his arguments, was not without sympathy for Whistler ("You are a friend of Mr. Whistler, Mr. Burne-Jones, I believe?" asked the judge. "I was," replied Burne-Jones: "I don't suppose he will ever speak to me again after to-day.")<sup>1</sup> William Rossetti, who liked Ruskin, but gave evidence for Whistler. "I was suddenly and without the least forewarning," he wrote later, "subpoenaed, just before the trial, to give evidence as a witness on Whistler's behalf. I of necessity obeyed the subpoena, and expressed in the witness box my true opinion of more than one of the artist's paintings, including that which Ruskin had vilified, and which, indeed, I considered very inferior to some others. I was thus compelled to act, willy-nilly, in opposition to Ruskin's interest in the action. I regretted to have been coerced into so delicate, and in some sense so false, a position."<sup>2</sup>

The public, however, were vastly entertained. Sir John Holker tried to be funny and was not very: Whistler tried to be funny, and was. The jury were farcically obtuse. Whistlers were presented for display upside down; and a Titian was waved away as being "another of those Whistlers". In Whistler's defence William Rossetti contended that the *Falling Rocket* was both a work of art, and worth the two hundred guineas asked for it; though he admitted also that he personally did not admire it. Albert Moore said that he looked upon the *Black and Gold* as "simply marvellous, the most consummate art", and a work of originality rather than of eccentricity. W. G. Wells declared that Whistler's pictures were the works of a man of genius. No other witness in their defence was called.

For Ruskin, Burne-Jones admitted Whistler to be an artist, but submitted that the *Blue and Silver* was incomplete in composition and without finish, and that the *Falling Rocket* was simply "one of the thousand failures that artists have made in their efforts to paint right",<sup>3</sup> and could scarcely be said to be worth the sum asked for it. Frith (who was called because his dislike of Ruskin was well known, and

<sup>1</sup> Frances Horner, *Time Remembered*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 182-3.

<sup>3</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 88.



Ruskin wished to have a witness who would not be considered biased in his favour) denied that Whistler's *Nocturnes* were works of art, though later he admitted that Whistler had "very great power as an artist"; while Tom Taylor, critic of *The Times*, concurred that the *Falling Rocket* was not a good picture, and read his own critique from *The Times*, in which he had asserted that the *Nocturnes* were "worth doing because they were the only things Whistler could do".

The judge, however, asserted that the terms of Ruskin's remarks did in fact constitute libel; but that the jury must decide whether it was a case for substantial, or merely contemptuous damages. The jury considered for an hour, and then returned to award Whistler damages of one farthing: the judge giving judgment for him without costs. "The whole thing was a hateful affair," Burne-Jones wrote to Rossetti later, "and nothing in a small way annoyed me more—however, as I had to go, I spoke my mind, and I try not to think of it all more than I can help."<sup>1</sup> And to another friend he confided: "I wish all that trial thing hadn't been; so much I wish it, and I wish Whistler knew that it made me sorry—but he would not believe;" and years later to Frances Horner: "Do you remember when I let myself be put in a pillory to help at Whistler's trial . . . and even thought him wrong and Whistler right in a way, and yet I was right. He had lifted all England by his life and given himself and wasted himself: it would have been a shame not to have been on his side."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin, however, was very gratified by his support. "I'm very grateful to you for speaking up," he wrote him after the trial, "and Arthur says you looked so serene and dignified that it was a sight to see. I don't think you will ever be sorry hereafter that you stood by me, and I shall be evermore happier in the serene sense of your truth to me, and to good causes—for there *was* more difficulty in your appearing than anyone else's, and I'm so glad you looked nice and spoke steadily."<sup>3</sup>

Whistler, though bitterly wounded by the blow, professed to be triumphant, and more epigrams went the rounds. "I would not go so far as to say that I would Burne-Jones; but really somebody ought to Burne-Jones' pictures," he remarked wherever his admirers were assembled.

The following month, he issued his famous pamphlet *Whistler v. Ruskin: Art and Art Critics* (later reprinted in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*), in which he sought to justify his position both to his brother artists and to the public. "Now the war, of which the opening skirmish was fought the other day, in Westminster, is really one between the brush and the pen, and involves literally, as the Attorney-General has himself hinted, the absolute *raison d'être* of the critic.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Frances Horner, *Time Remembered*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 28.11.1878: *Works*, vol. 29, p. xxiv.

The cry, on their part, of *il faut vivre*, I must certainly meet, in this case, with the appropriate answer, *Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*.

"We are told that Mr. Ruskin has devoted his long life to art, and as a result—is Slade Professor at Oxford. In the same sentence, we have thus his position and its worth. . . . What greater sarcasm can Mr. Ruskin pass upon himself than that he preaches to young men what he cannot perform? Why, unsatisfied with his own conscious power, should he choose to become the type of incompetence by talking for forty years of what he has never done? Let him resign his present professorship, to fill the chair of Ethics at the university. As a master of English literature, he has a right to his laurels, while, as the populariser of pictures he remains the Peter Parley of painting."<sup>1</sup>

But Ruskin had already preceded him. On 28 November he had written to Dean Liddell from Brantwood: "Although my health has been lately much broken, I hesitated in giving in my resignation of my Art-Professorship in the hope that I might still in some imperfect way have been useful at Oxford. But the result of the Whistler trial leaves me no further option. I cannot hold a Chair from which I have no power of expressing judgment without being taxed for it by British Law. I do not know in what formal manner my resignation should be signified, but thought it best that the decisive intimation of it should be at once placed in your hands. It is much better that the resignation of the office should be distinctly referred to its real cause, which is virtually represented by this Whistler trial. It is not owing to ill health that I resign, but because the Professorship is a farce, if it has no right to condemn as well as to praise. It has long been my feeling that nobody really cared for anything that I *knew*; but only for more or less lively talk from me—or else drawing master's work—and neither of these were my proper business."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin, who could be every bit as biting in his condemnation as Whistler, now stated his case in *My Own Article on Whistler*, which, however, has never been published save in an appendix to the Library Edition. A few paragraphs extracted from it makes his position fully clear.

"The function of the critic, in his relation to contemporary art, is of course the same as that of the critic with respect to contemporary literature; namely, to recommend 'authors' . . . of merit to the public attention, and to prevent authors of no merit from occupying it. All good critics delight in praising, as all bad ones in blaming. . . .

"It has ordinarily been my privilege to extol, but occasionally my duty to condemn, the works of living painters. But no artist has ever been suspected of purchasing my praise, and this is the first attempt that has been made through the instrumentality of British Law to

<sup>1</sup> Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, pp. 25, 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 28.11.1878: *Works*, vol. 29, p. xxv.

tax my blame. I do not know the sense attached, legally, to the word libel; but the sense rationally attaching to it is that of a false description of a man's person, character or work, made wilfully with the purpose of injuring him. . . . And the only answers I think it necessary to make to the charge of libel brought against me by the plaintiff, are first, that the description given of his work and character is accurately true so far as it reaches; and secondly, that it was calculated, so far as it was believed, to be extremely beneficial to himself and still more to the public. In the first place, the description given of him was absolutely true. . . . I have spoken of the plaintiff as ill educated and conceited, because the very first meaning of education in an artist is that he should know his true position with respect to his fellow workmen, and ask from the public only a just price for his work. Had the plaintiff known either what good artists gave, habitually, of labour to their works, or received, contentedly, of pay for them, the price he set on his own productions would not have been coxcombry but dishonesty.

"I have given him the full credit of his candid conceit, and supposed him to imagine his pictures to be really worth what he asks for them. And I did this with the more confidence because the titles he gave them show a parallel want of education. All well-informed painters and musicians are aware that there is analogy between painting and music. The public would at once recognise the coxcombry of a composer, who advertised a study in chiaroscuro for four voices, or a prismatic piece of colour in four flats, and I am only courteous in supposing nothing worse than coxcombry in an artist who offers them a symphony in green and yellow for two hundred pounds.

"Nor is the final sentence in which the plaintiff is spoken of as throwing a palette in the public's face, other than an accurate, though brief, definition of a manner which is calculated to draw attention chiefly by its impertinence. The standard which I gave, thirty years ago, for estimate of the relative value of pictures, namely, that their preciousness depended ultimately on the greatness and the justice of the ideas they contained and conveyed, has never been lost sight of by me since, and has been especially insisted on lately, in such resistance as I have been able to offer to the modern schools which suffer the object of art to be ornament rather than edification. It is true that there are many curious collectors of libraries, in whose eyes the binding of the volumes is of more importance than their contents; and there are many patrons of art who benevolently comply with the fashion of the day, without expecting to derive more benefit from the fronts of their pictures than from the backs of their books. But it is a critic's first duty in examining the works proposed in public exhibition to distinguish the artist's work from the upholsterer's; and although it would be unreasonable to expect from the hasty and electric enlightenment of the nineteenth century, any pictorial

elucidation of the Dispute of the Sacrament, or the School of Athens, he may yet, without any severity of exaction, require of a young painter that he should work a little with his head as well as with his fingers; and may explain to the spectators, without libellous intention, the difference between Attic air and a London fog. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

A subscription had been raised by Ruskin's friends and admirers to cover the £400 of his costs: a second subscription set on foot by a friend of Whistler's for the same purpose failed dismally—inevitable result of perennial triumph in the *Gentle Art*. And if Ruskin paid dearly for his indiscretion by his resignation of his Slade Professorship, Whistler was soon to pay no less dearly by the bankruptcy in which the chaos of his financial affairs culminated, and the consequent sale of his charming White House.

Debonair as ever, caricatured at the Gaiety in the *Grasshopper*, and in sketches in *Vanity Fair*, Whistler nevertheless continued for years to pursue Ruskin with characteristic shafts. When, later, in Venice, he saw Bunney perched on a scaffold of St. Mark's, making drawings for Ruskin, he diverted himself by tying a card to his coat tail inscribed: "I am totally blind". At the private view of the Chelsea Arts Club in 1891, where he enjoyed a great success, he declared triumphantly that even Academicians had been seen prowling about the place in admiration, and that it only required a season ticket to be sent to Ruskin to make the situation perfect. And when, in the fulness of time, he sold the *Falling Rocket* for eight hundred guineas, his great wish was that Ruskin could know that it had been valued at "four pots of paint".

With the reaction in favour of Whistler, and against Ruskin, which set in at the beginning of the century, the *beau rôle* in the Whistler v. Ruskin trial was usually given to Whistler. Yet none of Whistler's great contemporaries thought as highly of him as fashion demanded after his death, and it is unlikely that time will afford him other than a second-rate position in the history of art.

Holman Hunt wrote of Whistler in his book on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: "I cannot hesitate to record that at the Grosvenor Gallery he showed defiant slovenliness of work, which he could not have intended to be taken seriously. A daring example in my mind was a life-sized canvas, loosely smeared with paint, which professed to represent a ballet dancer, and another dashing *abozzo*, said to be a portrait, scarcely fell outside this category."<sup>2</sup> Millais used to say of him: "Clever a fellow as he is, I regard him as a great power of mischief amongst younger men—a man who has never learnt the grammar of his Art, whose drawing is as faulty as it can be. . . ." While even Rossetti, who, during the days of their friendship, earned from Whistler the characteristic tribute—"A charming fellow, the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 585-7.

<sup>2</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 2, p. 361.

only white man in all that crowd of painters. Not an artist, you know, but charming, and a gentleman"—came at last, so Watts-Dunton says, to consider him a brainless fellow who had no more than a malicious quick wit at the expense of others, and whose manner of painting in the new French school was "simple putrescence and decomposition". As for Carlyle, Allingham has recorded that he thought Whistler "the most absurd creature on the face of the earth".<sup>1</sup> This was the attitude which Ruskin was to adopt himself. When, in 1880, a friend wrote to him from Glasgow to say that the *Falling Rocket* had just been sold in that city, despite enormous advertisement, for a few pounds, he answered that he was sincerely obliged for the information, and much more pleased by it than perhaps some of his friends would think it virtuous to be, as the "principal annoyance in the whole matter to me was the way my best friends wrote as if Mr. W. was really something of a dangerous match and antagonist. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, it was fourteen months before *Fors Clavigera* appeared again.

<sup>1</sup> *William Allingham: A Diary*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Arrows of the Chace: Works*, vol. 34, p. 544.

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## Chapter VI

1. *Ruskin resigns the Slade Professorship: social visits: new friends: second attack of brain fever: holiday abroad.* 2. *Ruskin meets Francesca Alexander: his admiration of her character and work.* 3. *Invitation to resume the Slade Professorship: the popularity of his lectures.* 4. *The Pre-Raphaelites again: praise of Rossetti: friendship with Holman Hunt: appreciation of Millais: relations with Burne-Jones.* 5. *The lectures become eccentric: Ruskin's suggestions to the Vice-Chancellor ignored: his disgust over the introduction into the University of vivisection: he resigns his Oxford chair.*

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I

RUSKIN'S resignation of the Slade Professorship, to which he was soon to be re-elected, did little to impair either his popularity or his zeal for work, and F. Wedmore has left a vivid impression of the famous lecture upon *Snakes* that he delivered at the London Institution in 1880. "I remember well his advent—the door opening at the bottom of the theatre—and, with William Morris, I think, and certainly Frederick Leighton and other friends, and patting Leighton on the back (or was it William Morris?) a little nervously, yet bearing himself bravely, the observed of observers, this man of world-wide fame, and, what is so much more impressive and important to those who feel it at all, of extraordinary and magnetic genius—this genius was suddenly amongst us. And, gravely and slowly, with a voice at once of good quality and a rough Cumbrian burr, Ruskin began his discourse. All listened intently; and as the theme developed, and his interest in it gained, and as he felt—for he must have felt—that he held us in the hollow of his hand—the fascination increased, and the power and beauty that justified it."<sup>1</sup>

He had been a welcome guest, too, of late, at several great houses: amongst them, Windsor Castle, to visit the "bright and gentle" sick prince Leopold, where he had "expected to have a room with a view, if the room was ever so little", and was given instead "a great big one looking into the Castle yard", which made him feel exactly as if he were in "a big modern county gaol with beautiful turrets of modern Gothic":<sup>2</sup> and Hawarden, to visit Gladstone, where, as he wrote to Dr. Brown, "people are perpetually trying to discuss things with me of which I know the bottom all round, and have *told* them the bottom and all round twenty years ago; and the deadly feeling of the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 26, pp. xlii–xliii.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 21.8.1878: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 236.

resilience and immortality of the undintable caoutchouc of which most people's heads are made is too much for me."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, he found that he couldn't say half he wanted to Mr. Gladstone, because of the Duke of Argyll, to whom he had to be perpetually civil. "My refuge was always Mary Gladstone, who is a very 'perfect woman, nobly planned'. Papa and Mama, and the Duke, and everybody went away on the Tuesday, and left Mary to take care of me all Wednesday, and she did, and I was very sorry to come away."<sup>2</sup>

To the end of his life, Ruskin always disliked the ceremony and convention of great houses. "I think I was born for my aunt's bakery business, and not for Claremont,"<sup>3</sup> he once wrote to Mrs. Severn from that august address.

There were, too, even in these latter days, new friendships; and at the dinner parties of William Graham, he met the rising stars of a younger generation, such as Asquith, John Morley, Augustine Birrell, A. J. Balfour and J. B. Haldane. Ruskin had been introduced to the Grahams by Burne-Jones; and "I think," William Graham's daughter Frances wrote of him years later, "Ruskin (who was a strange, complex character) rather enjoyed our making such a fuss of him, because he felt Burne-Jones would have preferred us not to do so. Burne-Jones liked very much to have his friends all to himself, and in a locked compartment of which he kept the key." Very soon Frances Graham was "on her knees" to the great man. "I thought him the dearest company and the greatest man I had ever known." With her, when in London, he often used to indulge in his favourite relaxation of visits to the circus and to the zoo; and it was with her that he attended the first performance of Wagner in England, which he disliked exceedingly, moaning, throughout the intervals, for the graceful amenities of Mozart and Rossini. Once he even stood up, and exclaimed in a loud voice, much to the embarrassment of his hosts and their musical friends: "Oh, that someone would sing Annie Laurie to me."<sup>4</sup>

Frances Graham also used to visit Brantwood sometimes, and was taught to call her elderly host "St. Crumpet" as Rose had done; and Ruskin flirted with her a little, innocently and charmingly; and certainly without any of the serious intentions that—like certain friends of Kate Greenaway's, who were quite sure that she could have been Mrs. Ruskin had she wished—caused her to consider him seriously as a potential husband. "We used to go out on the lake and on the hills together," she wrote years later, "Ruskin always making a curious sort of love to me, and I wondering if I could care for him enough to spend much of my life with him. He was often rather

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Dr. John Brown*, ed. Limon and Forest (1907), pp. 305-6.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 25.10.1883: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 470.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Horner, *Time Remembered*, p. 51.

unkind, and loved power; he was not tender by nature and we quarrelled constantly, but his talk was so delightful and his courtesy so great that I always came back to his lure, though he was old by that time, and had had one of the attacks which afterwards ended in destroying his mind.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, his illness, short as it had been, had turned him suddenly into an old man: but an old man with a still indefatigable zest for work. “Utterly jaded and feverish with nearly sleepless night and crowding thoughts,” he wrote in his diary on the second day of the New Year—“wonderful in sudden call upon me for action and I so feeble, but must answer a little. Thankful for the clear guiding—see the new *Fors* begun yesterday.”<sup>2</sup> He still pursued all the old activities—“You burn like iron wire in oxygen, and I often wonder how you survive your own intensity,” Dr. Brown wrote him at this time—still wrote, now a new number of *Deucalion*, now of *Proserpina*, and now of his last architectural work, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, a collection of sketches of Christian architecture and contingent history which was to “gather into united illustration of the power of the Church in the Thirteenth Century”,<sup>3</sup> of which only a few fragments other than the first title remain; *The Bible of Amiens* was to be the first part: he still translated each morning a piece from Plato’s *Laws*: but his gallant energy was deceptive, and he had entered irremediably into a period of slow decline. His letters to newspapers and to casual correspondents, evoked now, more frequently, by the publication of his previous letters to the press in *Arrows of the Chace*, became more arrogant, more choleric; and were sometimes even truculent and offensive. Some of his writing, while containing all the old petulance and prejudice, lacked all the old penetration and fire; and the papers upon *Fiction*, *Fair and Foul*, which he contributed at this time to the *Nineteenth Century*, show, with a tragic clarity, the obliquity of an exhausted mind whose ideas had become crystallised in the life and memories of the past. Nevertheless, there were still occasions when his perceptions were as clear and as powerful as in his childhood, and “the divine crimson lighted by the fire of each minute lens”,<sup>4</sup> of dew on a Sweet William in the morning light, could still bring to his heart the joy which he had known in youth at the sight of the first plum blossom.

In August he was well enough to travel, however, and took a three months’ holiday in France, chiefly to gather material for *The Bible of Amiens*, that faint echo from the days of *The Stones of Venice*, translated into French, three years after his death, with such devotion by the young Proust. But the venture had exhausted him, left him

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, 2.1.1880: *Works*, vol. 33, p. xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. lviii.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary*, 11.8.1880: *Works*, vol. 33, p. xxii.



"beaten and tired" and with the determination to seek recreation amongst the rocks and grass.

In February of the New Year, came the news of Carlyle's death; and the month following, another period when his mind was clouded by strange dreams which invaded even the daylight hours. But his was a nature that, voluntarily, could not rest, and he continued with all his customary activities, until, early in March of the following year, the ominous clouds of a troubled nescientness descended upon him once more. He was afflicted with sleepless nights, by "grotesque, terrific, inevitable dreams", and there were times when he became wildly delirious. "I went wild again for three weeks or so, and have only just come to myself—if this be myself, and not the one that lives in dreams," he wrote to Norton on 24 March. "The two fits of whatever you like to call them are both part of the same course of trial and teaching, and I've been more gently whipped this time and have learned more but I must be very cautious in using my brains yet awhile."<sup>1</sup> And a few days later to Dr. Brown: "The illness was much more definite in its dreaming than the last one, and not nearly so frightful. It taught me much, as these serious dreams do always, and I hope to manage myself better, and not go Argonauting any more. But *both* these illnesses have been part of one and the same constant thought, far out of sight to the people about me, and of course, getting more and more separated from them as *they* go on in the ways of the modern world, and I go back to live with my Father and my Mother and my Nurse, and one more,—all waiting for me in the Land of the Leal."<sup>2</sup>

This time, indeed, Ruskin saw, and accepted his illness, as a sinister and admonitory shadow of what was probably to come. "I have directed Mr. Allen, in this and all future issues of his list of my purchasable works, to advertise none but those which he is able to dispatch to order by return of post," he announced the following July. "The just estimate of decline in the energy of advancing age,—the warnings, now thrice repeated, of disabling illness consequent on any unusual exertion of thought,—and chiefly, the difficulty I now find in addressing a public for whom, in the course of the last few years of Revolution, old things have passed away, and all things become new, render it, in my thinking, alike irreverent and unwise to speak of any once intended writings as 'in preparation'. . . . May I also venture to hint to friends who may at any time be anxious about me," he continued, in the manner which Mrs. Oliphant considered "positively sublime and calculated to throw its readers into fits of laughter", "that the only trustworthy evidences of my health are my writings; and that it is a prettier attention to an old man, to read what he wishes to say, and can say without effort, than to require him

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 24.3.1881: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 29.3.1881: *Works*, vol. 37, pp. 347-8.

to answer vexing questions on general subjects, or to add to his days' appointed labour the burden of accidental and unnecessary correspondence."<sup>1</sup> For as he complained elsewhere, he was now rarely able to fix his mind on a sentence or a thought, for five minutes in the quiet of the morning, "but a telegram comes announcing that somebody or other will do themselves the pleasure of calling at eleven o'clock, and that there's two shillings to pay. . . ."

This illness left him restless, irritable, suspicious. "He is almost as active as ever," young Laurence Hilliard, his secretary at this time, wrote to Professor Norton, ". . . but he seems more and more to find a difficulty in keeping to any one train of thought or work, and it is sad to see him entering almost daily upon new schemes, which one cannot feel will ever be carried out. So far as he will allow us, we try to help him, but the influence of anyone of those around him is now very small, and has been so ever since the last illness."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he was busy as ever, and even embarked upon the study of modern music—gaily sending word to a friend that even yet he might end by writing *Modern Musicians*.

Presently his physician, Sir William Gull; who paid his patient the compliment of keeping his cheque as an autograph rather than cashing it, advised a continental tour, and early in August Ruskin set out with Collingwood yet once again on a leisurely journey to Italy through many of his favourite places in France.

## 2

It was during this visit to Italy that Ruskin made the discovery, and won the friendship, of Francesca Alexander, that talented and lovable young American artist whose work he considered, by reason of the purity of its inspiration and the love and understanding with which it was achieved, to reach the highest category of which art is capable.

Living with her parents in a secluded Italian village, Francesca had grown up, under their care, in an intimacy with the local peasants that was the result of her personal genius for charity. The Alexanders, one of the oldest and most cultured of Boston families, on friendly terms with such notable figures as Frederick Tennyson, Lowell, Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Leighton and Cardinal Manning, had settled in Italy on account of Mr. Alexander's delicate health—and here, taught by her father (he was a distinguished portrait painter), Francesca's talent had unfolded with a natural simplicity that was due partly to her own fine nature, and partly to her complete immunity from all the styles and theories of the schools.

As soon as he saw her work, Ruskin was as impressed and enchanted

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 652.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 15.10.1881: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 691.

by it as he had been by her whole personality; and at once offered her £1,000 for her book of pen and ink drawings, to include the privilege of publication. But Miss Alexander refused to accept more than the £600 at which her father had previously valued the work; and, in addition, later sent him to publish also her sensitive and lucid descriptions of the lives of those of whose portraits the book was composed.

"I never knew such vivid goodness and innocence in any living creatures as in this Mrs. and Miss Alexander,"<sup>1</sup> Ruskin wrote in his diary a few days after he had first met them: and that Christmas he wrote affectionately to his new friend: "There is no one like you—no one—among all my friends, and I have many—and many sweet ones, and some who love me very much, but I have never yet known anything like the flowing river of kindness, deep and soft and swift all at once, that you have unsealed for me. . . . You have interpreted more of Christianity to me than I had learned of all my teachers, even of the hills and sky. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

"Sorella" he used to call her; and her mother, "Mamma": while he became for her "Fratello" and, indeed, confided in her, in his latter years, with a love even more appreciative than that of a brother.

Later, when he lectured upon her work in London, to an audience which was composed, not only of such celebrated men as Lowell, Matthew Arnold, Leighton, and Burne-Jones, but such great ladies as the Princess of Wales, Lady Gordon, and the Duchess of Buccleuch, there was much astonishment that Ruskin should value these simple and unpretentious works so highly. He nevertheless realised her faults as a draughtsman clearly enough, but chose, as was his habit, only to show the beauties of the fine gold that had been entrusted to him, and which, before, was a "treasure hid in a mountain field in Tuscany".<sup>3</sup> Watts alone, later, agreed with Ruskin that Francesca's drawings seemed to him by far the most sincere and real thing he knew.

Francesca herself described with humorous lucidity to a friend in a letter of December 1882, the sudden notoriety into which Ruskin's interest had plunged her: "There were Mr. Ruskin's *adorers*, who would ask where he stood when he came to my room and then, with much solemn emotion, would go and stand in the same spot. . . . And then there were his enemies, some of whom regarded me with positive malignance, made up faces at my work, and accused me of not doing it as I said I did; while others looked upon me as an innocent victim and warned me sadly of the ill treatment that I must shortly expect to receive."<sup>4</sup>

Ruskin, indeed, admired Francesca's work so much that, as with

<sup>1</sup> Diary, October 1882: *Works*, vol. 32, p. xxii.

<sup>2</sup> L. G. Swett, *Ruskin's Letters to Francesca, etc.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 32, p. xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, *Ruskin's Letters to Francesca*, p. 380.

the pages of his most valuable manuscripts, nothing could restrain him from dispersing it. He gave drawings to Oxford: drawings to this school and that museum, and to this friend and that, so that later, when they were reproduced by photography, although so much care was taken in trying to recollect them, the series remained incomplete.

But the friendship of Francesca, and the beauty and sympathy of her many letters to him, remained one of the greatest consolations of his life.

## 3

It was on this tour, too, that, with reviving energy, Ruskin formed the hope of returning to his duties at Oxford, and let it be known that he was quite willing to resume his Slade Professorship. This willingness being shared equally by influential members of the University, Sir William Richmond, an old friend, who now held that office, obligingly and conveniently resigned; and early in 1883 Ruskin received an affectionate telegram from Acland to say that he had been reinstated in his place. So early that summer Ruskin returned to Oxford to deliver the series of lectures that was to be known henceforward as *The Art of England*; but, too frail now to inhabit his rooms at Corpus, he lodged instead with Alexander Macdonald, his "official" drawing master. "The Macdonalds lived in the Woodstock Road," wrote Henry Newbolt, who, with D. S. MacColl, was amongst Ruskin's enthusiastic audience at this time; "their son was at Corpus, and their house with its varied attractions was always ready to receive us and our friends. It was at one of their dances that I first met and even talked with John Ruskin himself. At the end of a dance I was leaving the room with my partner, Miss Arnold, when the great little man, who had been watching us from the doorway, laid his hand upon my arm and begged us almost pathetically to go back and dance one more Highland Schottische for him. We petitioned our hostess: in a moment the music was restarted, and as we pranced round the room we saw John Ruskin beating time to our step, with his head thrown back and his eyes half closed in a kind of ecstasy."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Norton, who met him a few months later at Brantwood, has left another vivid record of him at this time. "I had left him in 1873 a man in vigorous middle life, young for his years, erect in figure, alert in action, full of vitality, with smooth face and untired eyes. I found him an old man, with look even older than his years, with bent form, with the beard of a patriarch, with habitual expression of weariness, with the general air and gait of age. But there were all the old affection and tenderness; the worn look readily gave way to the old animation, the delightful smile quickly kindled into full warmth; occasionally the unconquerable youthfulness of temperament re-

<sup>1</sup> Newbolt, *My World as in My Time*, p. 114.

asserted itself with entire control of manner and expression, and there were hours when the old gaiety of mood took possession of him with its irresistible charm. He had become, indeed, more positive, more absolute in manner, more irritable, but the essential sweetness prevailed. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's first series of lectures, at the beginning of which he ventured to relieve his audience's mind of the "unhappily too well grounded panic" that they should turn out one-half sermons, was a conspicuous success. "The Vice-Chancellor made a very pretty speech of welcome afterwards," Ruskin wrote after the first one to Mrs. Severn. "The undergraduates cheered no end, and Baxter said the people going away who couldn't get in were like a church coming out. I was obliged to promise to give the lecture again to-morrow."<sup>2</sup>

As usual, he was determined to devote himself to his duties with complete self-dedication. ". . . Yes, it is very sad that I can't get done here," he wrote to Kate Greenaway from Oxford on 17 June, "but there are three years of absence to redeem, and being allowed in my own department to have my own way entirely, it is a very stringent duty to do the best I can. And just think what the arrangements of a system of teaching in connection with a great university mean, or *should* mean."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, his second series of lectures entitled *The Pleasures of England* was often so crowded that many townspeople had to be turned away. "I wonder if you're little enough to go in my breast pocket!" he wrote to a small girl who had applied to him personally for a ticket of admission. "I don't in the least know how else to get you in. For I've made a Medo-Persic-Arabic-Moorish-Turkish law that no strangers nor pilgrims are to get into the lectures at all, but only Oxford residents, and even so they can't all get in that want to. Look here, the first lecture, which is next Saturday, will be rather dull, but if you could come on Saturday the 25th, I would take you in myself under my gown, and get you into a corner."<sup>4</sup>

Years later, Oliver Elton wrote of the deep impression which these lectures had made upon him. ". . . The voice comes back to the mind's ear, with its singular wailing quality, which seemed to the young imagination like that of a wandering and saddened angel, full of quite woeful, open-eyed and inextinguishable surprise that the incorrigible world of men should be what it is, and yet never ashamed of itself."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 9.3.1883: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 440.

<sup>3</sup> M. H. Spielman and G. S. Layard, *Kate Greenaway* (1905), p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> L. Allen Harker, "Happy Memories of John Ruskin", *The Puritan*, May 1900.

<sup>5</sup> Swett, *John Ruskin's Letters to Francesca*, p. 13.

After his estrangement from Rossetti, Ruskin seemed to have lost much of his interest in the Pre-Raphaelites. But in 1878, when he was staying in Perthshire at Dunira, the home of William Graham, member of Parliament and ardent connoisseur, to whom he had been introduced recently by Burne-Jones, and found the drawing-room there hung with Rossetti's *Annunciation*, Millais' *Blind Girl* and Burne-Jones' little drawing *Marriage Dance*, some of his old interest was rekindled, and he wrote for the *Nineteenth Century* two papers entitled *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism*. In this treatise he referred to the *Annunciation* as amongst the earliest pictures which had drawn public attention to the new school: to the *Blind Girl* as being amongst those "chiefly characteristic of its determined manner",<sup>1</sup> and of the little *Marriage Dance* as being "no less characteristic, in its essential qualities, of the mind of the greatest master whom that school has yet produced".<sup>2</sup>

Greatest, perhaps, because the most wholly faithful. Millais, who had been a Pre-Raphaelite chiefly by the accident which had brought him into close contact with Holman Hunt, had long since adopted broader and more characteristic methods: Rossetti had thrown "more than half his strength into literature, and, in that precise measure, left himself unequal to his appointed task in painting; while Mr. Hunt, not knowing the necessity of masters any more than the rest of our painters, and attaching too great importance to the externals of the life of Christ, separated himself for long years from all discipline by the recognised laws of his art; and fell into errors which wilfully shortened his hand and discredited his cause. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

But in his first two lectures in *The Art of England*, Ruskin now had more to say of Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Burne-Jones: and it is here, indeed, that he has left his final judgment upon the Pre-Raphaelite school.

Rossetti had died tragically, saturated with chloral, and pursued by melancholy memories of Lizzie, at Birchington the previous year; and of this "much loved friend", in the reverence of sorrow, he now spoke first. "I believe," he said (and surely to-day there is no one who would dispute him?), "his name should be placed first in the list of men, within my own range of knowledge, who have raised and changed the spirit of modern Art: raised, in absolute attainment; changed, in direction of temper. Rossetti added to the before accepted systems of colour in painting, one based on the principles of manuscript illumination, which permits his designs to rival the most beautiful qualities of painted glass, without losing either the mystery or the dignity of light and shade. And he was, as I believe is now

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, l.c.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168.

generally admitted, the chief intellectual force in the establishment of the modern romantic school in England."<sup>1</sup>

Holman Hunt, indeed, had now become, for Ruskin, generously apologetic, Rossetti's disciple, which is to detract nothing from his own noble and determined genius: for in all living schools it chances often that the disciple is greater than his master, and it is always the first sign of a dominant and splendid intellect that it knows of whom to learn. "Rossetti's great practical genius justified my claiming for him total and, I believe, earliest, originality in the sternly materialistic, though deeply reverent, veracity with which alone, of all schools of painters, this brotherhood of Englishmen has conceived the circumstances of the life of Christ. . . . To Rossetti, the Old and New Testaments were only the greatest poems he knew, and he painted scenes from them with no more actual belief in their relation to the present life and business of man than he gave also to the *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Vita Nuova*. But to Holman Hunt, the story of the New Testament, when once his mind entirely fastened on it, became what it was to an old Puritan, or an old Catholic of true blood,—not merely a Reality, not merely the greatest of all Realities, but the only Reality."<sup>2</sup>

Ruskin's personal relations with Holman Hunt had become gradually more affectionate since their famous meeting in Venice in 1869, when, before the Tintoretto *Annunciation*, Ruskin had read him what he had written of it twenty years before, and, instead of the "boyish presumption and inflated expression"<sup>3</sup> that he had expected to find, decided, as he closed the book, that there was no exaggeration or bombast such as there might have been, and that he was well content to find the words described very faithfully the character of the picture.

On the following day, over dinner at Danieli's, Ruskin had even diffidently enquired why Hunt had never before made any overtures of friendship. Hunt's close friendship with Millais and, under the delicate circumstances, the social conventions attendant thereto—together with the "character of the band of men Ruskin had about him" (meaning, presumably, Howell and Rossetti)—these last, alone, had been sufficient to keep him at a distance, "even had Ruskin been the Archangel Michael himself", his companion had declared.<sup>4</sup> Upon which Ruskin sadly admitted that he never had been a very good judge of character; and, in a burst of confidence, told his guest of all his religious doubts.

But the intimacy established upon that occasion had developed into a lasting friendship; and in the latter years of his life, Ruskin's grey upholstered carriage, with its ample and ingeniously designed

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 270-1.

<sup>3</sup> W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 2, p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 264.

fittings, was frequently to be seen drawn up before the Hunts' commodious old house in Fulham. Ruskin's admiration for Hunt, both as painter and as man, had always been, and was always to be, both eloquent and sincere. "No words can express to you the toil Hunt has gone through, nor the difficulties which he has mastered, unmet before in art, nor the seriousness and sturdiness of purpose which he has maintained through the trials first of personal hardship, then of scorn, and finally of vociferous and often foolish applause," Ruskin had written to Froude in 1874.

"Among the men I know, or have known, he is the *one* (literal) Christian of intellectual power. I have known many Christians—many men of capacity: only Hunt who is both, and who is sincerely endeavouring to represent to our own eyes the things which the eyes were blessed which saw. . . . He has never for an instant faltered in his conviction that a picture should be as like reality as possible, down to the minutest detail. This is Dante's conviction. It was Apelles'. It was Titian's. Believe me, *It is right!*"<sup>1</sup>

And to Mrs. Severn he wrote in July 1882: "I had an entirely happy afternoon with Holman Hunt—entirely happy . . . because first, at his studio I had seen, approaching completion, out and out the grandest picture he has ever done, which will restore him at once, when it is seen, to his former sacred throne. . . . Of course my feeling this made *him* very happy, and as Millais says the same, we're pretty sure, the two of us, to be right."<sup>2</sup>

Despite his disappointment with some of Millais' later works, Ruskin, in his Oxford lectures, was generously enthusiastic, naming *Caller Herrin*, which was exhibited in the Fine Art Society's rooms in 1882, as the "highest of all yet produced by the Pre-Raphaelite School."<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin never lost his old admiration and affection for Millais, and in 1886, when Millais was taken ill, wrote to Mrs. Severn that he was very sorry, and begged her to find out for him the precise details. But his chief preoccupation in these lectures was really with the mythic style of painting of Burne-Jones.

Ruskin's intimate relations with Burne-Jones had undergone similar vicissitudes to those of many of his other friends. Lavish with affection and gifts to his "dear children", in the old days, he had had the street outside their house laid "as deep as a riding school" with tan bark when Georgiana was ill in childbirth of a second son that was ultimately born dead; given them some of his most precious woodcuts and Dürer engravings; and (according to William Rossetti) endowed Howell with money to establish himself in a new house at Fulham, not only in order to maintain Burne-Jones in health and spirits, but

<sup>1</sup> Letter, undated, 1874: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of July 1882: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 290.



to buy for him all his works that had not been commissioned by others.

Nevertheless, as Burne-Jones' genius developed along its own individual lines, there came a time when, though his affection for Ruskin remained constant, his artistic allegiance was sorely disturbed. He had been outraged, in particular, by Ruskin's much misunderstood lecture upon Michael Angelo delivered at Oxford in 1871: so dejected after Ruskin had read it to him privately, indeed, that he "wanted to drown himself in the Surrey canal or get drunk in a tavern, as it didn't seem to him worth while to strive any more if he could think it and write it".<sup>1</sup>

"You know more of him than I do," Burne-Jones had written to C. E. Norton that year, "for literally I never see him or hear from him, and when we meet we clip as of old, and look as of old, but he quarrels with my pictures and I with his writings, and there is no peace between us—and you know all is up when friends don't admire each other's works."<sup>2</sup> But this estrangement was but of short duration, and Burne-Jones, as he wrote to Norton again, very soon succumbed once more to Ruskin's expansive charm. "Ruskin is back—came one day last week, and I forgave him all his blasphemies against my Gods—he looked so good through and through. But I want you to keep the peace between us, for after a month I shall begin to quarrel again."<sup>3</sup>

Such a situation was inevitable. As Burne-Jones, like Rossetti before him, developed more and more the individuality of his genius and employed more and more a personal and unorthodox technique, it was difficult for him to maintain his earlier attitude of the adoring pupil: the more so as the Slade Professor was not always wholly accurate in his technical pronouncements, and had even been known to inform Cardinal Manning, kneeling down before the work in question, that a work of Burne-Jones executed in oil was "pure water colour, my lord".<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the fundamental affection that existed between the two men was of sufficient strength to surmount such petty irritations, and when, in 1883, Burne-Jones heard Ruskin lecture upon Cistercian architecture—the subject of his proposed second part of *Our Fathers Have Told Us*—he found it "like most ancient times and of his very best"; and that the lecturer himself looked "stronger than for many a year past. The hair that he has grown over his mouth hides that often angry feature, and his eyes look gentle and invite the unwary, who could never guess the dragon that lurks in the bush below".<sup>5</sup>

The correspondence which preceded Ruskin's lecture upon Burne-Jones was redolent of all the affectionate playfulness of the old days when Ruskin had always signed himself to his "dear children" "your

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 22, p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 133.

loving Papa". "I want to come and see all the pictures you've got, and to have a list of all you've done!" the Professor jovially announced. "The next lecture at Oxford is to be about you—and I want to reckon you up, and it's like counting clouds." "When will you come?" Burne-Jones had eagerly replied; "and what will you say about me? Shall you say I do all I ought not to do, and won't be guided, and am obstinate and nasty and tiresome? . . . I'm so glad you are going to say a word about me in my own country—that is Oxford. I feel very happy about it and it's a surprise. But forebodings as to the approach of doomsday are upon me." This was exactly the mood that Ruskin could appreciate, and he rose to it in characteristic vein. "It's lovely to think of your being in that retributive torment. I shan't tell you a word of what I'm going to say! Mind you don't miss *any* of the foolish things out of the list, or I'm sure to find it out. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

And fortunately Ruskin's praise was all that Burne-Jones could have hoped. "If I may venture to say as much without presumption," Swinburne wrote afterwards to the gratified painter, "I never did till now read anything in praise of your work that seemed to me really and perfectly apt and adequate. I do envy Ruskin the authority and eloquence which gave such weight and effect to his praise." <sup>2</sup>

## 5

Eloquent as he was in his lectures, not only over the Pre-Raphaelites, but over the work of Allingham and Kate Greenaway, Leighton and Watts, Leech and Tenniel, George Robson and Copley Fielding, much of Ruskin's great success, it must be sadly admitted, was due to little more than a ribald curiosity on the part of the more irresponsible of his audience as to what he would say and do next. As his lectures became more discursive, his manner more garrulous, eccentric and choleric, numbers of undergraduates came simply for the fun of hearing what "old Ruskin" would be up to now. For it was evident enough now to his contemporaries that his mental poise was unstable, and that he needed to be handled with the greatest tact. Even Jowett, the Master of Balliol, who had never cared for him in earlier days, was seen, when with the Slade Professor, "gently and imperceptibly leading the conversation away from dangerous or over exciting topics, and directing his numerous enthusiasms into channels least likely to be disturbing to the peace of the University". <sup>3</sup> But the peace of the University was a thing for which Ruskin cared less than nothing, and in 1884, although he had formerly affirmed that he no longer had "either strength or

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> L. Allen Harker, "Happy Memories of Ruskin", *The Puritan*, May 1900.

passion to spare in matters capable of dispute", Ruskin had no reluctance in letting it be known that he intended to devote his new series of lectures to attacking the atheistic-scientific (or, as he held it, pseudo-scientific) spirit which was obsessing the University to the detriment of all true culture.

The storm broke in the autumn, when he concluded his lecture upon Protestantism with a piece of buffoonery amusing enough in its way, though, under the circumstances, in very doubtful taste. Having first produced a copy of Carpaccio's *St. Ursula* as a pure type of Catholic witness—in a state of almost breathless excitement he asked the audience with what type could best be summarised the spirit of Protestantism. This question was, of course, merely rhetorical; but when he answered it himself a moment later by producing an enlargement of a pig by Bewick as symbolic of the earnest spirit; and a drawing of Mr. Stiggins, with soiled gloves and a concertina, as the hypocritical one; not only the Catholic members of the audience held their breath in astonishment, but even the London press began to contain leaders expostulating against this "academic farce";<sup>1</sup> and the scientists began "to slink out of his way as if he were a mad dog".<sup>2</sup>

But even Ruskin himself realised by now that the state of his mind was tragically precarious, and resolved in his diary that "he must never stir out of quiet work more".<sup>3</sup>

With Oxford, as with so many human beings, Ruskin had found himself appreciated only so long as he was prepared to give. His gift of Turner's drawings had been accepted with alacrity, but when he suggested the purchase of two others which were on the market in order to complete the collection, his suggestion was ignored. His lavish endowments of time, ingenuity, materials and fittings to the Art School had been received likewise, but when he pleaded urgently at last for increased accommodation for the teaching of art, this too was denied.

His letter to the Vice-Chancellor of 28 February, 1884, clearly shows the chagrin and disgust he felt for all their polite excuses and evasions. "Dear Mr. Vice-Chancellor—I regret to find from your reply to my former letter, that it seemed to you a recapitulation of supposed claims on the University of Oxford, on which I could found an appeal for any personal favour or recompense.

"My reference to anything I have been permitted to present to Oxford, or to do for her, was simply in the hope of somewhat justifying her farther confidence; and not at all with the intention of taxing her gratitude. I neither doubted, nor assumed, the existence of that luminiferous aether,—but, had I been disposed to test its excitability by a beggar's petition, it seems to me that the suggestion of your

<sup>1</sup> *The World*, 19.11.1884.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 1.12.1884: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 501.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary*, 23.12.1884: *Works*, vol. 33, p. lv.

letter, that I should withdraw from the recommendation I had offered, the only one in which I could be supposed to take a personal interest, enough teaches me how beggars should be answered.

"The purport of my letter is simply to state that I, having done all I could do, or was inclined to do, for Oxford, it was now time she should do something for herself; that an opportunity was now offered to her such as could never occur again, of perfecting her Turner Collection in the precise elements of the master's finished work in which it was deficient; and that the efficiency of her drawing schools might be indefinitely extended, if she would incur the expense of walling in and roofing over the bit of ground she was leaving as a waste timber yard. . . .

"Touching the present poverty, or incurred debt, of the University, I can only say that it seems to me its students had better have been examined in tents than charged extra for the ornamentation of their Inquisition Chambers;—but with respect to the several claims upon her purse, of Science and Art, I can conceive no necessity beyond that of popular outcry, for any instruction in the convolutions of viscera or the nationalities of vermin; but that there can be no debate concerning the necessity for the instruction of youth in the principles of Art now so universally practised and admired that they must, according to their character, either refine or enervate the entire fabric of modern Society."<sup>1</sup>

To Ruskin, the spirit prevailing now at the University was distressingly alien; and the vote endowing vivisection the following March offered the opportunity he required to tender his resignation. He was not alone in his detestation of this activity being admitted officially to the University curriculum—the Master of Pembroke, the Provost of Westminster, the Bishop of Oxford, Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) amongst others were all ardent anti-vivisectionists; and the Bishop, indeed, collaborated with him in producing a pamphlet against vivisection which passionately inveighed against the manner in which "these scientific pursuits were now defiantly, provokingly, insultingly separated from the science of religion".

But as Ruskin admitted later to a friend, one can do with two motives what one cannot do with one; and, sincere as his indignation was, it also gave him an adequate excuse for denying in the press that he had resigned on account of "failure in energy or ability"<sup>2</sup> or for any other kindred reason.

He had, two years before, bequeathed to the Bodleian Library his books, his Titian portrait, and many more of his favourite Turner drawings. But a year later he revoked this bequest; and two years after his resignation, he even removed from the Drawing School many drawings and pictures that he had left there on loan. Thus his break with Oxford was at last final and complete.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 37, pp. 476-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25.4.1885.

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## Chapter VII

1. *The Storm Cloud: Darwin.* 2. *Mineralogy.* 3. *Further brain attacks: their beauty and terror: curt letters to strangers: resignation and self-disillusionment.* 4. *The "Bibliotheca Pastorum: Studies of Peasant Life".* 5. *"Praeterita": friendship with Sydney Cockerell and Detmar Blow: journey to Italy: new life in Paris: visit to the Alexanders: he falls ill on the way home.*

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I  
AS THE nineteenth century wore on, with mechanisation becoming increasingly ubiquitous, with factories proliferating over huge tracts of formerly virgin countryside, and their chimneys belching into the air vast, incessant clouds of murky smoke, a change began to come over the very face of nature. Not only were virgin fields and hedgerows transformed into slum tenements and railway tracks, but gases and carbon, mixed with minute particles, the product of incomplete combustion, rose into the air so densely that they could not always be freely absorbed in the stratosphere, and were blown about in horrid masses by stray air currents until the whole of the surrounding atmosphere became contaminated, and man could no longer see the sky. Observers noted how even the very winds seemed changed, blowing dark and chill from quarters whence they should come dry and warm: and Ruskin, the observer of all observers, who had measured the blue of the sky with a cyanometer as a boy, and recorded, ever since, every transient phase of its recurring splendours, was first to proclaim the mysterious and sinister advent of the new phenomenon, which was withering the face of nature, and blighting all cause of spontaneous joy in the deadened hearts of a generation who valued everything in terms of profit.

For years this sense of a darkening world, partly apprehended by his delicate sensibilities, partly imagined as a result of the closing prison house, had weighed heavily upon his spirit. "Of all things that oppress me, this sense of the evil working of nature herself—my disgust at her barbarity—clumsiness—darkness—bitter mockery of herself—is the most desolating," he had written to Norton in 1871. "I am very sorry for my old nurse, but her death is ten times more horrible to me because the sky and blossoms are dead also."<sup>1</sup> That summer also he lamented bitterly in *Fors*: "The sky is covered with grey cloud; not rain cloud, but a dry black veil, which no ray of sun can pierce. . . . And everywhere the leaves of the trees are

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, p. 32.

shaking fitfully, as they do before a thunder storm; only not violently, but enough to show the passing to and fro of a strange, bitter, blighting wind."<sup>1</sup> A year later he added, as a postscript to another letter:

"Pitch dark day.

"Q. (not a critical one) After that time of homicide at Siena, Heaven sent the Black Plague. 'You will kill each other, will you? You shall have it done cheaper.'

"We have covered ourselves with smoke. 'You want darkness?' says Heaven. 'You shall have it cheaper.'"<sup>2</sup>

In two lectures upon *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* delivered at the London Institution in February 1884, Ruskin publicly deplored the new wind of darkness, through which no ray of sunlight could ever penetrate: and with accurate records extracted from his diaries, sought to show that his words were more than the expressed ill humour of a soured old man. "Had the weather when I was young been such as it is now," he concluded, "no book such as *Modern Painters* ever would or *could* have been written; for every argument, and every sentiment in that book, was founded on the personal experience of the beauty and blessing of nature, all spring and summer long; and on the then demonstrable fact that over a great portion of the world's surface the air and the earth were fitted to the education of the spirit of man as closely as a schoolboy's primer is to his labour, and as gloriously as a lover's mistress to his eyes."<sup>3</sup>

Ruskin's vision of the *Storm Cloud*, though based upon accurate observation, was nevertheless exacerbated by the subjective closing of iron bars upon his childlike vision, and the slow and tragic failing of his mental powers. Already five years before, when Darwin—continually called by the over-courteous Professor Sir Charles—had met with Ruskin during a visit to the Lakes, he had perceived (so his daughter wrote later) by Ruskin's perplexed look when he spoke of the new and baleful kind of cloud which had appeared in the heavens that his brain was becoming clouded.

Ruskin had not met Darwin since his undergraduate days, until Norton re-introduced them during his stay in England in 1867. Despite the wide difference of their views, the two men got on together well enough; Ruskin, indeed, finding Darwin unexpectedly agreeable. As a result of this, Darwin had been persuaded to visit Denmark Hill to see the Turners. But though he politely feigned appreciation, he later admitted to Norton that he could not conceive what Ruskin saw in them. Ruskin himself was even more sceptical of Darwin's theories than Darwin was of the genius of Turner, and often ridiculed them mercilessly in print, as in *Love's Mimic*, where, in his lecture on the Robin, he wrote intrepidly: "We might even

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 8: *Works*, vol. 27, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of John Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, pp. 77-8.

sufficiently represent the general manner of conclusion in the Darwinian System by the statement that if you fasten a hair brush to a mill wheel, with the handle forward, so as to develop itself into a neck by moving always in the same direction, and within continual hearing of a steam whistle, after a certain number of revolutions the hair brush will fall in love with the whistle; they will marry, lay an egg, and the produce will be a nightingale."<sup>1</sup> And in his later correspondence upon the *Best Hundred Books*, he was even more scathing, deleting his name from the list proposed by Sir John Lubbock "because it is every man's duty to know what he *is*, and not to think of the embryo he was, nor the skeleton that he shall be. Because, also, Darwin has a mortal fascination for all vainly curious and idly speculative persons, and has collected, in the train of him, every impudent imbecility in Europe, like a dim comet wagging its useless tail of phosphorescent nothing across the steadfast stars".<sup>2</sup>

But as with Tolstoy, it was the "school of" Darwin against which he revolted, rather than against Darwin himself—the pseudo-scientific school which seeks always to find causes for the manifestations of the higher faculties by attributing them to defects in the physical ones. "I have been made, for life, somewhat uncharitable towards scientific men, by a wretched oculist who made all London believe that Turner's last style was only the result of a form of jaundice," he wrote to Dr. Brown in 1874 of "a gentleman who seems to have anticipated some of the theories of Adler".<sup>3</sup> And for all such theoretical pseudo-scientific extravagances Ruskin was always to have the most profound contempt.

## 2

One of Ruskin's greatest pleasures in this last phase of his life was the arrangement and classification of collections of minerals. To handle rare specimens, not on account of their value, but on account of the strange beauty of their iridescence and the strange, complicated and perfect structure of their form, always gave him a keen delight. Towards the end of his life, many specimens from the collection he had made since the day when, as a boy, he had spent his pocket money, to his father's annoyance and surprise, upon acquiring a bit of glittering spar, were carefully catalogued, and, with characteristic generosity, given away to various schools and institutions he was interested in. The finest collection, as may be expected, was arranged for, and presented to, the Ruskin Museum at Sheffield: but other collections, besides those already given by him in the past to Harrow and Winnington, were presented to the museum at Kirkcudbright, to Whitelands

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 25, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Arctos of the Cbace; Works*, vol. 34, p. 586.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Dr. John Brown*, ed. Lisson and Forrest, p. 302.

Training College, Chelsea, and to St. David's School, Reigate, which was under the headmastership of the Rev. W. H. Churchill, who had married his old friend Constance Hilliard.

In the early eighties, Ruskin pottered about a good deal in the mineralogical section of the Natural History Museum which had been moved recently to South Kensington, and where he indulged in "lovely little fights" with the amiable curator, who was so obliging that in 1887 Ruskin could not restrain himself from presenting the national collection with a fine uncut diamond which had cost him £1,000, "not to be called the Ruskin, nor the Catkin nor the Yellow-skin diamond" but to be named the Colenso diamond, in honour of "the loyal and patiently adamantine First Bishop of Natal"; and a ruby, which had cost him £100, to be named after Sir Herbert Edwardes, in honour of his "invincible soldiership and loving equity by the shores of Indus". At the same time, he christened the collection of pink crystals of fluor which he had given to the museum many years ago, the Couttet Rose Fluors, in memory of his old guide and friend "the last Captain of Mont Blanc",<sup>1</sup> by whom they were found.

Still as ardently fascinated by his specimens as he had been as a child, in the early "eighties he was planning, with the help of Collingwood, a Grammar of Crystallography, which as his secretary-biographer wrote later "was to be a manual of the actual forms, the phenomenology, of native gold and silver and other minerals which crystallise into fronds and twigs and tangles, and pretty, plant-like shapes, unregarded by the mathematicians, and quite unexplained by the elementary laws of crystallography. Illustrated from the beautiful specimens in his collection, with such exquisite drawings as he made of these tiny still life subjects, it would have been a fairy book of science".<sup>2</sup>

By February 1884, indeed, he was almost as enthusiastic over his diverse occupations as he had been in his maturity thirty years before. ". . . I can't write; because I've always so much to say," he wrote to Charles Eliot Norton at this time. "How can I tell you anything of the sea of troubles that overwhelm old age—the trouble of troubles being that one can't take trouble enough?

"At this moment I'm arranging a case at the British Museum, to show the whole history of silica, and I'm lending them a perfect octahedral crystal of diamond weighing 129 carats. . . . And I'm giving them dreadful elementary exercises at Oxford which they mew and howl over, and are forced to do, nevertheless; and I'm writing the life of Sta. Zita of Lucca; and an essay, in form of lecture, on clouds, which has pulled me into a lot of work on diffraction and fluorescence; and I've given Ernest Chesneau a commission to write a life of Turner from a French point of view—under my chastisement

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 14.12.1887: *Works*, vol. 26, p. lv.

<sup>2</sup> Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin*, p. 339.



'if too French'; and I've just got the preface written for Collingwood's *Alps of Savoy*, supplement to *Deucalion*; and I'm teaching Kate Greenaway the principles of Carpaccio, and Kate's drawing beautiful young ladies for me in clusters,—to get off Carpaccio if she can.

"And I've given Boehm a commission for twelve flat medallions, Florentine manner, life size, of six British men and six British women. . . .

"And I'm beginning to reform the drama, by help of Miss Anderson; and I had *The Tempest* played to me last week by four little beauties—George Richmond's grandchildren. . . . And I've given three sets of bells (octaves) to Coniston school, and am making the children learn chimes.

"And I'm doing a Fors now and then in a byway. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The following year, he was deep in correspondence over scientific questions with the young Oliver Lodge.

### 3

As the years passed, the nightmares became more terrifying: invaded for longer periods the waking hours. Outside a peacock cried, and with its dismal, piercing shrieks there came a vision of the Evil One, powerful and obscene, bidding him commit some hideous wrong. Striving valiantly to resist, so that he had thrown off all the bedclothes and his forehead was bathed in sweat, Ruskin tossed in agony, until, in his delirious mind, the wrong had been committed, and once more the peacock shrieked with triumph. Sometimes, Ruskin even sensed the approach of the Evil One before he came, and then, racked with anguish, and naked throughout bitter winter nights, he would pace his room, waiting in tortured frustration for the dawn. Once, upon opening the window after such a hideous vigil, a large black cat sprang into the room from behind the mirror—surely the foul fiend at last, in person. With trembling fingers, he seized it quickly and dashed it against the floor with all his strength. The creature fell with a dull thud. Virtue had triumphed: and the victor, who had been called upon to fight all evil single-handed, threw himself in a state of ecstatic exhaustion upon his bed, where he was found later prostrate and bereft of sanity.

Sometimes out of the darkness would come wild demons, forming themselves into the most loathsome shapes. The furniture, too, became haunted, and grotesque: a dreadful congregation of gnomes and imps. The bedpost turned suddenly into a leering, gibbering witch: hateful, obscene. Then, quite suddenly, the room would be invested with a strange, celestial radiance. The Turner drawings became pictures out of heaven; the wall paper and curtains of a loveliness incredible: while all the time a certain part of Ruskin's

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.2.1884: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 475.



XXXI. JOHN RUSKIN AT BRANTWOOD, 1885

*From a photograph*



mind, clear and detached as though it were carrying on an independent investigation, observed and analysed all that happened.

In March 1883, he had confided to Charles Eliot Norton something of the strange beauty which sometimes interpenetrated this world of nightmare. ". . . It is curious that I really look back to all those illnesses, except some parts of the first, with a kind of regret to have come back to the world. Life and Death were so wonderful, mingled together like that—the hope and fear, the scenic majesty of delusion so awful—sometimes so beautiful. In this little room, where the quite prosy sunshine is resting quietly on my prosy table—last year, at this very time, I saw the stars rushing at each other—and thought the lamps of London were gliding through the night into a World Collision. . . . Nothing was more notable to me through the illness than the general exaltation of the nerves of sight and hearing, and their power of making colour and sound harmonious as well as intense—with alternation of faintness and horror of course. But I learned so much about the nature of Fantasy and Phantasm—it would have been totally inconceivable to me without seeing how the unreal and real could be mixed. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Yet, until the end of the decade, his recovery from these attacks was usually so complete that he was able to face his tragic fate with an admirable fortitude and humour. "Darling Charles—" he wrote again to Norton in August 1886. "Your note to Joan of the 13th is extraordinarily pious, for *you*! and not a bit true! It is not the Lord's hand, by my own folly, that brings these illnesses on me; and as long as they go off again, you needn't be so mighty grave about them. How many wiser folk than I go mad for good and all, or bad and all, like poor Turner at the last, Blake always, Scott in his pride, Irving in his faith, and Carlyle, because of the poultry next door. You had better, by the way, have gone crazy for a month yourself than written that niggling and nagging article on Froude's misprints."<sup>2</sup>

Many turned from him in those tragic days. Others served him with devotion. ". . . All that I now remember of many a weary night and day is the vision of a great soul in torment," wrote Collingwood later, "and through purgatorial fires the ineffable tenderness of the real man emerging, with his passionate appeal to justice and baffled desire for truth. To those who could not follow the wanderings of the wearied brain it was nothing but a horrible or grotesque nightmare. Some, in those trials, learnt as they could not otherwise have learnt to know him, and to love him as never before."<sup>3</sup> Now, too, if his apparent arrogance was exacerbated by weakness and ill health, his essential sweetness of nature was clearly revealed in his constant love for his friends. He wrote innumerable letters, as tender, as

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, pp. 191-3.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 215-17.

<sup>3</sup> Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin*, p. 382.

spontaneous and as witty as those of Charles Dodgson—not only to his many little girl friends—the daughters of the Prime Minister—of old friends such as Lily Armstrong; but to elderly ladies such as Miss Susan Beever, to artists such as Kate Greenaway and Francesca Alexander; and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to teach the children of the village school, or to entertain them to lavish festivities at Brantwood. On particularly festive occasions, indeed, a “sumptuous” dinner would be given on his behalf in the local school hall, to all the children of the neighbourhood; and sometimes as many as three hundred and fifty assembled on Old Christmas Day as his guests.

Nevertheless, from the days immediately prior to his first mental collapse, Ruskin’s letters to strangers (and sometimes to acquaintances) had become more and more arrogant and brusque. “Don’t waste your money on buying my books or anybody else’s,” he had replied brusquely in December 1877, to a stranger’s very innocent request for some information. “To love the beautiful in painting you must first love it in nature, then be long among the noble art. You have little nature left at Glasgow within thirty miles, and no art within three hundred. Don’t be ridiculous and affected whatever you are. If you live at Glasgow you may be happy in Glasgow ways, and in those only. All the books in earth or heaven can’t teach you to love the beautiful (from the Apocalypse down).”<sup>1</sup>

In another ten years, however, his outspokenness had overreached the limits of politeness. “I am scornfully amused at your appeal to me, of all people in the world the precisely least likely to give you a farthing!” he replied to a request for a subscription to help pay off the debt upon Duke Street Chapel, Richmond. “My first word to all men and boys who care to hear me is, ‘Don’t get into debt. Starve and go to heaven, but don’t borrow. Try first begging—I don’t mind if it’s really needful—stealing! But don’t buy things you can’t pay for.’ And of all manner of debtors pious people building churches thus idiotically built, iron churches are the damnablest to me. And of all the sects of believers in any ruling spirit—Hindoos, Turks, Feather Idolaters, and Mumbo Jumbo, Log and Fire Worshipers—who want churches, your modern English Evangelical sect is the most absurd, and entirely objectionable and unendurable to me! All of which they might very easily have found out from my books—any other sort of sect would!—before bothering me to write it to them. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

This letter was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*; and to a correspondent who felt “irresistibly impelled to enquire if it was genuine”, Ruskin replied even more brusquely: “You had better resist your impulsions, and use your common sense. No one who has the slightest understanding of my books need doubt that letter.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Arrows of the Chase: Works*, vol. 34, p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 595.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

But these acerbities, even though they never contained opinions not arrived at in more sober moments, were nearly always the result of a mind about to be plunged shortly into darkness; and the older he grew, the more deeply irksome he found it to be pestered continually with questions the answers to which could be readily found by anyone who had studied his work.

"I am sixty-eight this month, have my own business to do and books to read and beg to decline reading the three by eight equal twenty-four columns of Manchester 'opinions' on the subject of art teaching, among which you honour me by the request that I should intercolumniate mine," he replied to a student who was collecting various expert opinions following a published attack upon the methods pursued by the Manchester School of Art. "If the twenty-six students on whose behalf you sign will subscribe each of them a shilling fee for my opinion, let them buy my *Laws of Fesole* and lend the book to each other, and do what it bids, till they begin to understand a little what it means. . ."<sup>1</sup>

Such letters, unfortunately, while in essence expressive enough of his long considered views, merely provoked the people whom they irritated to declare that he was mad: and few letters could be more tragic than that to the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 6 June, 1887, asking the editor to contradict the "partly idle, partly malicious rumours" which had got into the papers respecting his health that spring, in the postscript of which he declared: "Whenever I write a word that my friends don't like they say I am crazy, and never consider what a cruel and wicked form of libel they thus provoke against the work of an old age in all its convictions antagonistic to the changes of the times, and in all its comfort oppressed by them."<sup>2</sup>

Besides people continually troubling him for his opinions, for contributions, he was also assailed by growing numbers of those who sought his advice upon works of art, so that, here again, he was forced to issue an official statement in self-protection: "All pictures on which Mr. Ruskin's opinion is desired are to be sent to Mr. H. W. Savening, 29 Duke Street, St. James', London. If Mr. Savening judges them worthless, they will be returned, charging only the expenses of carriage and a fee of five shillings. If Mr. Savening thinks them worth giving an opinion upon, he will return them with that opinion written, charging a fee of ten shillings.

"If Mr. Savening judges them worth submitting to Mr. Ruskin, he will do so at the owner's request, charging a fee of a guinea, to be paid to the St. George's Guild, and half a guinea for his own trouble, besides expenses of carriage."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the post that arrived every morning now at Brantwood was a formidable affair—"solid proof of the penalties of greatness. The

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 603.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 608.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 655.

number of parcels, to say nothing of letters from all sorts of people, were terrible to contemplate," a visitor to Brantwood, who had seen them, wrote later. "Sketches, volumes of poems—how we groaned under those poems!—manuscript awaiting criticism, and letters—some admiring, some remonstrating—not to say impertinent, upon every conceivable subject."<sup>1</sup>

But by now Ruskin was tired of impertinent and importunate correspondents; as he was tired of impertinent and importunate visitors. "I can't have any visiting, and . . . I must make you understand what I've told you now twenty times if once, that I *won't talk*," he had written to an acquaintance in the spring of 1880. "I see people whom I can teach, or who can teach me—you can be neither pupil nor master. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

More and more he was becoming resigned to the fact that his teaching was still generally misunderstood. "Is it such pain to you when people say what they ought not to say about *me*?" he wrote to Miss Susan Beever. "But when do they say what they ought to say about anything? Nearly everything I have ever done or said is as much above the present level of public understanding as the Old Man is above the Waterhead."<sup>3</sup>

Yet he never became crystallised in self-complacency; and in his deepest heart, he never forgave himself his own weaknesses. "My *one* question about a man is, whether his work is right or not," Ruskin wrote to Norton in 1883. "Pope's lies, or Byron's, in the *Waltz* affair and the like, or Carlyle's egoisms, or my own follies, or Turner's, I recognise as disease or decay, or madness, and take no interest in the nosology; but I never excuse them, or think them merely stomaching, but spiritual disease. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

## 4

Closely connected with Ruskin's Guild of St. George was the little library of books that he published through George Allen, entitled *Bibliotheca Pastorum*—the Shepherd's Library. As Tolstoy was to do only a very few years later in Russia with *The Intermediary*, Ruskin wished to provide simple and unlettered people with the greatest literature accessible; though his methods in doing so were of a very different kind. For whereas Tolstoy's company produced the works of the sages at less than a penny, Ruskin's finely printed and handsomely bound volumes were sold for a respectable sum. Such books, however, would readily be available to those who could not afford to buy them, in public reading rooms and public libraries; and his

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 722.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May 1880: *Works*, vol. 37, pp. 314-15.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 4.9.1880: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 324.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of J. Ruskin to C. E. Norton*, vol. 2, pp. 194-5.

*Shepherd's Library* was designed not only for every home in his community of St. George, but for inclusion in the permanent library of every school that he had hoped would be brought into being by the Guild. No such schools, unfortunately, ever existed, and so his *Bibliotheca Pastorum* never reached the public for which it was primarily intended.

The genesis of this library was a walk at Brantwood, when, on entering a shepherd-farmer's cottage, he found that the few books available there to the children were of such a pitiful nature that it behoved him to try to provide them with something of greater intrinsic worth. It is, perhaps, illustrative of the almost comically idealistic side of Ruskin's nature, that the first list of books that he planned in order to ensure that the little daughters of shepherd-farmers were provided with suitable "bibles for delight and instruction" included Xenophon's *Economist*, Hesiod, Virgil's *Georgics I* and *II* and *Aeneid VI*, *Livy I* and *II*, a *History of England after the Conquest*, the *Life of Moses*, the *Life and Writings of David*, Dante, Chaucer, St. John the Divine, and Gotthelf's *Ulric the Farm Servant*. Of this noble and ambitious list but few appeared. Those that did, however—the *Economist* of Xenophon, translated by A. Wedderburn and W. G. Collingwood (1876); *Rock Honeycomb*; *Broken Pieces of Sir Philip Sydney's Psalter—Laid up in store for English Homes*, with a Preface and Commentary by the Editor (1877); *Elements of English Prosody for Use in St. George's Schools*: Explanatory of the various terms used in *Rock Honeycomb* (1880); *A Knight's Faith*: Passages in the Life of Sir Herbert Edwardes: Collated by John Ruskin from *A Year on the Punjab Frontier*, 1848-9 (1885); and *Ulric the Farm Servant: A Story of the Bernese Lowland*, by Jeremias Gotthelf, Translated into English from the Original German by Julia Firth; Revised and Edited, with Notes, by John Ruskin (1886-8)—are amply characteristic of Ruskin's intention and achievement. His ambition, as usual, outsoared his energy. But what he did produce was of the greatest educative value; and his preface to *Rock Honeycomb* at least indicates the great thought he had given to music, in the abstract forms of melody which correspond to the beauty of cloud and mountains, which he once declared would never be known either from his works or his biographies.

In the preface to the first volume of classic works, which he "hoped to make the chief domestic treasure of British peasants", he explained that he used "classic" in the sense of a work containing an unchanging truth, expressed as clearly as it was possible for any of the men living at the time when the book was written to express it, and that by peasants he means those whose life is devoted to agriculture, whose present separation from the rest of the community is a sign of modern barbarism, and who, in a truly organised society, would be separated from the burgher "only as the office of each member of the body is



distinct from the others on which it nevertheless vitally depends".<sup>1</sup> Similar in intention to the *Shepherd's Library* were those *Studies of Peasant Life*—*The Story of Ida* (1883), *Roadside Songs of Tuscany* (1886) and *Christ's Folk in the Apennine* (1887-9)—which, sent him, in long letters, over a period of time, by Francesca Alexander, who could describe the peasantry with whom she had so much sympathy as well as she could paint them, in their affectionate rendering of truth, and their perfect simplicity of expression, resemble nothing in literature so closely as the *Folk Tales* of Tolstoy. Octavia Hill, who read *The Story of Ida* soon after its publication, wrote of it with fine appreciation to her mother: "It reminds me, in its perfect simplicity of narrative, with quiet undercurrent of unobtrusive feeling, of the very early painters' work. It goes right to one's heart, and one utterly forgets everything and everyone but the subject."<sup>2</sup>

The compilation of *Christ's Folk in the Apennine* was, indeed, one of the last literary labours of Ruskin's life; and, running parallel as it did to *Ulric the Farm Servant*, which in its stringent appreciation of the virtues of simplicity, industry and thrift, satisfied in himself the intense valuation of these qualities that he had inherited from his mother, slowly brought him back to relive his early days and resurrect them for posterity in the magic pages of *Praeterita*.

## 5

The last five years of Ruskin's working life were passed in a gentle dream, troubled only at intervals by the nightmares which still invaded the daylight hours, or by the moods of depression, gloom and suspicion that these engendered. At last the peaceful sweetness of resurrected childhood completely captured his mind: and at regular intervals he gave to the world what is perhaps the most essentially characteristic, and is certainly the most charming, of all his works—*Praeterita*. This, with the editing of some volumes of the *Bibliotheca Pastorum*, was the most that his declining energies would permit; but though physical strength was slowly failing, the mind that, in its unclouded periods, still controlled the pen was singularly clear and lucid; and purged, at last, of the fitful cholers of frustration.

Based upon the autobiographical sketches which had appeared already in *Fors Clavigera*, *Praeterita*, fragmentary and unfinished as it is, more than any other of his works gives an unforgettable portrait of the wise, witty, gentle, generous and curiously sweet-natured being who was John Ruskin. Vague, often, as to dates, and with grievous omissions, it nevertheless recreates the past, not only bathed in an aura of poetry, but mysteriously transformed by art. Not Tolstoy's *Childhood*, not the *Oblomov's Dream* of Goncharov,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 31, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 451.

not Proust's *Combray*, recapture more clearly the celestial light, or portray with a more penetrating and affectionate humour the innocent environment of a growing child.

And, indeed, the sweetness of *Praeterita* was but the reflected sweetness of Ruskin's twilight hours, before the strange and mysterious sea of nescience engulfed him once more in the living death that was his last decade. It is the sweetness that informs the innumerable charming and playful letters that he wrote at this time to his many little girl friends; or that attracted to him and won the devoted affection of talented young men. A little girl named Katie MacDonald had formed a society called the *Friends of Living Creatures*; and nothing could have exceeded the charming friendliness with which he followed its activities, or pondered, with its president, upon the all absorbing and intricate question as to whether shrimpers were eligible for membership.

There is something infinitely touching, too—surely indicative of the immense loneliness which, despite his many friendships, had followed him all his life—in the affectionate and eager manner with which he reciprocated all overtures of friendship. For not only little girls, such as Gladstone's daughters, eagerly treasured his letters: but young men such as Sydney Charles Cockerell and Detmar Blow were entranced in his presence, looked upon him almost as a god, and awaited his letters with excited anticipation.

Sydney Cockerell, in 1886 a youth of nineteen, had, in his immense admiration, ventured to send Ruskin a collection of shells, and to suggest that he should make him another for the museum at Barnsley in which Ruskin was interested; and Ruskin had expressed himself more than willing to avail himself of such kindness to the full. When, presently, Cockerell naively divulged his age, Ruskin charmingly replied that he had had a notion, somehow, that his correspondent had been "collecting" shells since before the Deluge, and was glad he was so young. A year later there followed a visit: and the young man, after spending the previous morning "palpitating with anticipation", found himself miraculously in the presence of the Master. "He was fairly tall," he wrote later, "but his height was already diminished by a little hunch in the shoulders. His hair was dark, long and thick, his beard iron-grey. His head was of the long type. His forehead sloped, and on each side, between his temples and his ears, there was a noticeable depression. He had heavy eyebrows and the bluest of blue eyes. His hands were small and delicate. . . . He wore very old-fashioned clothes—trousers and, double breasted waistcoat of homespun and a long dark coat. Round his neck was a gold chain attached to his watch. His smile was kindness itself, his voice sometimes almost caressing. He could not quite pronounce his R's."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Friends of a Lifetime: Letters to S.C.C.*, ed. V. Meynell (1940), pp. 30-1.

This was the prelude to a charming friendship both with the young man and his sister; though it was shortly after this visit that Ruskin had one of his attacks of delirium, during which he quarrelled with Mr. and Mrs. Severn, who left Brantwood in dudgeon, while a neighbour and disciple, Mrs. Julia Firth, who was making the translation of *Ulric the Farm Servant*, came to keep house for him. But this arrangement soon proved unsatisfactory, and his cousins, forgiving and forgiven, returned to Brantwood a few weeks later.

The despondency that followed this attack remained, however, for many months: nor did a prolonged sojourn at Sandgate lasting well into the following year do much to dispel it. Early in June 1888, therefore, he set off with Arthur Severn for France, hoping to find a cure in the foreign travel that had served him so often in the past. At Abbeville, he fell in with Sydney Cockerell and a young architect friend of his, Detmar Blow, who were staying in the town to study the architecture that Ruskin had written of with such beguiling eloquence: and both of them were entranced by the eager overtures of friendship that he made. "Cockerell carries my umbrella for me as if he were attending the Emperor of Japan," Ruskin wrote to his cousin, "and Detmar is as good as gold."<sup>1</sup> And though Cockerell was compelled shortly to return to London, Detmar Blow was free to accompany Ruskin into Italy where he hoped to see Francesca Alexander, holding on his knees the rosewood box in which Ruskin still kept Rose's treasured letters, and which he still carried with him wherever he went. That Ruskin was grateful for the affectionate attention of these young men there can be no doubt; and though he was still a prey to melancholy, he admitted to having had "some perfect weeks in the autumn". Indeed, so altogether worshipful was Detmar Blow, "a perfect creature in goodness and strength of character", that Ruskin declared that "if he has a fault, it's his way of always begging my pardon when I run against him. The other day, just to see how earnestly apologetic he would be, I had two minds to push him into the Lake of Thun, off a favourable road edge above four feet of water. If the water had only been clear as it used to be, I don't think I could have lost the chance".<sup>2</sup>

That August, indeed, it was almost as if he had been born anew. "It seems as if my life had been given back to me as it was in 1878," he wrote to Francesca on the 25th: "before any of the delirious illness. I am drawing and writing with my old decision and pleasure, doing what delights Joan in *Praeterita*, and giving the French copyists in the Louvre something to think about, extremely new to them."<sup>3</sup> And next day: "What will you think of your Fratel, I wonder, now! He was up at five this morning and out for an hour's walk

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *John Ruskin's Letters to Francesca, etc.*, ed. Swett, p. 175.

before his coffee, the first time these three years, and enjoyed it ever so much.”<sup>1</sup> And the following December, Francesca wrote to a friend: “We went to Bassano, and while there we had an unexpected pleasure in a visit from Mr. Ruskin, who, being in Switzerland, came down to Italy on purpose to see us. When Mamma heard that he was coming, she very kindly invited him to her house, where he stayed for nine days and made himself as pleasant as possible, winning the hearts of all the Bassano people by his kind ways. He struck me as looking better in health than when I last saw him. His greatest pleasure was in listening to Silvia’s very beautiful music, and she was extremely kind and passed all her evenings in playing to him. The children attached themselves to him in a wonderful way, and little Bebo, in the evenings when the music was going on, would nestle up to his side, lay his head against his shoulder and go comfortably to sleep. When he went away, he gave Edwige a letter directed ‘All’ Edwige nostra’, which she gave me to open and read to her. It contained fifty francs with a few very kind words. But it was a sad parting for me, for the feeling was strong in my mind that we should not meet again, and oh, Lucy, how good he has been to me all these years! He could not have been any kinder to me if I had been his daughter, or sister, as he always used to call me. He is pretty well now, but feeble, and not as I could wish to see him.”<sup>2</sup>

Francesca’s forebodings were only too soon to be proved true. On the way home, at Paris, darkness descended upon Ruskin once more; and Mrs. Severn came over to take him home. Thereafter, the light of reason never fully, or for long, returned. Even such powers of concentration as he had managed to retain failed him after his recovery; and, sitting at his table piled with papers, this man who had dedicated himself so wholly to his vocation would pluck, now at one, now at another, without being able to wrest from them either significance or coherence. Very soon he felt himself to be “going crazy with the hares again”;<sup>3</sup> and at last, after so many recoveries from attack, the brain that had been so keen in analysis and so accomplished in expression succumbed to alien forces greater than it could conquer.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 410-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. xxxvii.

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## Chapter VIII

1. *Octavia Hill: her attitude to Ruskin: Cockerell tries to effect a reconciliation: the virtue of silence.* 2. *Ruskin's return to faith: criticism of the Church: Christianity and pseudo-Christianity: his personal creed: the true Catholicism.* 3. *Reconciliation with Mrs. La Touche: ineradicable grief for Rose: he sends her poems and letters to Francesca: Francesca's consolation: "faithful unto death".* 4. *The cloud descends: last years.*

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### I

AS WITH Ruskin, the scope of Octavia Hill's interests had steadily widened with the passing of years: like his, they lay always in the direction of a fuller and more happy life for the people. The Kyrle Society for studying the problem of Smoke Abatement; societies for the preservation of open spaces; the National Trust—all these were greatly indebted to her energy and ability for their success. In 1881, after one of Ruskin's serious attacks, she had herself bought from Ruskin the first houses she had ever managed in Paradise Place: in 1884 her reputation was such that peers and Cabinet ministers would call to consult her over various matters in which she had had years of practical experience. But Octavia Hill retained all the modesty of the truly great. "I cannot think why I, who have done so simply, and at no great cost, just what lay before me, should be singled out in this kind of way," she wrote to her mother, when offered a seat in the Abbey for Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

Her influence upon all those who came in close contact with her was unmistakable. "Miss Octavia Hill had an extraordinary influence upon me in my boyhood," Greville MacDonald wrote of her years later, "though she could have known nothing of it. She was the first person who taught me how to learn, and how to love learning. In my youth, when I began to know a little more of her social power and her personal sacrifice, she had more to do, I think, than even my father, in giving me a steadfast faith; which, thanks to her heart and life, became established amidst the ruins of conflicting questions, and has ever grown in steadfastness."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Sydney Cockerell (who had met her in 1871) described her vividly to a friend as "an unobtrusive, plainly dressed little lady, everlastingly knitting an extraordinarily fine piece of work, whose face attracts you at first, and charms you, as you become acquainted with the power of mind and

<sup>1</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 191.

sweetness of character, to which it gives expression; a lady of great force and energy, with a wide, open and well stored brain, but, withal, as gentle and womanly as a woman can be; and possessed of a wonderful tact, which makes her the most instructive and the pleasantest companion in the establishment."<sup>1</sup> Such was the Octavia Hill whom the young Sydney Cockerell had known and admired since his early youth.

And now, in his intense love and admiration for Ruskin, he hoped to bring about a reconciliation between them. Apparently he did not know that such a reconciliation had taken place years ago. For in 1878, in reply to a letter from Ruskin which has not been printed, she had written to him in deep affection: "Thank you very much for your letter.

"Please don't think about me. If in anything you ever did or thought there is anything you would wish otherwise, forget it, as if it had never been. Never mind telling me, or even telling yourself, whether there was anything, or nothing, or if anything how much, or what it was; just, if it occurs to you, put it from you like an unreal thing; never let it trouble you. You know this is what I wish always. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

And when, in 1881, he relinquished to her the lease of Paradise Place, Ruskin wrote to her: "I have had great pleasure in hearing, thro' Mrs. Severn, of the arrangements of Marylebone, etc., and am entirely glad the thing should pass into your hands, and that you are still able to take interest in it, and encourage and advise your helpers. I trust, however, you will not be led back into any anxious or deliberative thought. I find it a very strict law of my present moral being—or being anyway—to be anxious about nothing and to determine nothing."<sup>3</sup>

Or if Cockerell knew, idealist as he was, perhaps he felt that this reconciliation was insufficient until Ruskin had made some public reparation. This, at least, was what he hoped for: and his sister, Olive, who was Octavia Hill's godchild, joined with him in begging him to forgive her and to suppress for the future the record in *For*s of their dissension. "Quite vanquished," wrote Sydney Cockerell years later, "he owned that he had misjudged her, promised to do what we asked of him . . . kissed us both, joined our hands, gave us an affectionate blessing, and bade us farewell, we being touched to the heart and in tears."<sup>4</sup>

"I entirely had yielded when I took your tearful kisses and will do whatever Olive and you wish me to do," Ruskin wrote to Sydney Cockerell on 17 January, 1888, when his two young friends had left Sandgate. "I shall be thankful that you tell me what I *should* do,

<sup>1</sup> *Friends of a Lifetime*, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> C. Maurice, *Life of Octavia Hill*, pp. 383-4.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 445.

<sup>4</sup> *Friends of a Lifetime*, op. cit., pp. 43-4.

for I quite recognised the state of wildness I was in when I looked last night at those numbers of the second *Fors*—for the first time these four or five years certainly. But it has crushed and shamed me much and I am bewildered and weak.”<sup>1</sup> And to the affectionate enquiries from brother and sister as to whether he was now quite well, he wrote again two days later to Olive Cockerell: “No indeed not ill: perhaps you left me rather on the way to all wellness that ever I shall know. But bewildered and much cast down—yes. For Charlie does not yet see all that closing that rift means. It is not forgiving, but asking forgiveness—not for that error merely but for total wrongness in all one’s thoughts, in all one’s angers, all one’s prides. And while I see the disease now clearly I am not yet the least convinced that my thoughts of city and country work were wrong.

“This is what I have to think out—in whatever I write to explain my abolishing those wild numbers. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Nearly a year later, Sydney and Olive Cockerell showed this letter to Octavia Hill, and her noble reply to them is a fitting conclusion to the tragic misunderstanding which had cast a shadow upon the fundamental sympathy of aim that had existed between two great reformers for so many years. “I return the valuable letter, with *many* thanks to Olive and to you for letting me see it. I had not done so before. I think he is right about the forgiveness, and I think it *is* hard you should any of you expect a man who had the place in the world he had, when he knew me as a girl of not fifteen years, should ask forgiveness. Not for a moment do I myself wish it—unless in any way it took away from him the sadness of the memory of what he did. I tell you most distinctly I do not think there is very much in the whole affair,—that is, when the imperfections and limitations of earth and speech are cleared away I do not think there will be very much to clear up between Mr. Ruskin and me. Till that time, touched as I am by your chivalrous kindness about it, I do seriously assure you I think a merciful silence is at once the best and most dignified course for him and me. What has the world to do with it if we both feel silence all that is needed? There are things that nothing will ever put right in this world, and yet they don’t really touch what is right for all worlds.

“I say this for your sake, that you may feel at peace about it all, else nothing would make me say anything. Be at peace about it. I am. I hope Mr. Ruskin is. He may be. The thing is past, let us bury it; that which the earth will not cover, which is not of it, lives on in the eternal kingdom and in the thought of it earthly imperfection or mistake seem a very small thing. . . . It is absolutely how I see the thing. If in any way I do not know I was myself also wrong I hope that will some day be clear to me.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 63-4.

And thereafter, when Octavia Hill spoke of Ruskin, it was always with the greatest admiration and affection.

## 2

Throughout the 'seventies and the early 'eighties, Ruskin's attitude to religion apparently underwent a slow evolution, leading him from agnosticism to profound belief. But here, again, as with his political inconsistencies, the change was far more superficial than it appeared. In fact, like Tolstoy, Ruskin had never lost his deep reverence and belief in Deity. His rebellion was all against the narrow sectarianism in which he had been brought up, and, in particular, against that fashionable and perilous brand of nineteenth-century hypocrisy which Tolstoy called pseudo-Christianity. Two letters, both written in the early part of 1864, make his attitude of that time perfectly clear. "I do not feel that Christianity has failed," he wrote to Captain Brackenbury—"it is Simony that has failed—not the Sermon on the Mount—not Peter's impetuous one—but his antagonists. . . . I believe men are always failing from trusting to their own imaginations, and reconciliations of religion with them, and that a practical economy of the Sermon on the Mount has to be tried." While less than two months later, he was confiding to a clerical friend the universal puzzle it had been to him of recent years "to see you Christians as gay as larks while nothing touches you in your own affairs or friends—watching thousands of people massacred and tortured—helping to do it—selling them guns to shoot each other with, and talking civilities and protocols to men who are walking up to their loins in human blood."<sup>1</sup>

For many years, in *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin castigated the Church in England, much as Tolstoy castigated the Orthodox Church in Russia, for "teaching a false gospel for here". "Going to church," he wrote in *Fors*, "is only a compliance with the fashion of the day; not in the least a confession of Christ, but only the expression of a desire to be thought as respectable as other people. Staying to sacrament is usually not much more; though it *may* become superstitious, and a mere service done to obtain dispensation from other services. Violent combativeness for particular sects, as Evangelical, Roman Catholic, High Church, Broad Church—or the like, is merely a form of party egotism, and a defiance of Christ, not confession of Him.

"But to confess Christ is, first, to behave righteously, truthfully, and continently; and then, to separate ourselves from those who are manifestly or by profession rogues, liars, and fornicators. Which it is terribly difficult to do; and which the Christian church has at present entirely ceased to attempt doing. . . ."<sup>2</sup> "Thus, half an hour after

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 19.1.1864: *Works*, vol. 36, p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 86; *Works* vol. 29, pp. 336-7.



the congregation have sung 'The will of God be done', knowing perfectly well that there is not one in a thousand of them who is trying to do it, or who would have it done if he could help it, unless it was his own will too—or insulted God by praying to Him in the deadest of all dead languages, not understood of the people, they leave the church, themselves pacified in their personal determination to put no check on their natural covetousness, to act on their own opinions, be they right or wrong, and to do whatever they can, regardless of its consequences, to make money. . . ."<sup>1</sup> "As far as I can make out," said Ruskin scornfully on another occasion, "there is nothing so much the clergy dread for their congregations as their getting into their heads that God expects them to do anything beyond killing rabbits if they are rich, and being content with low wages if they are poor. . . . I never heard a clergyman yet (and during thirty years of the prime of my life I heard one sermon at least every Sunday, so that it is after experience of no fewer than one thousand five hundred sermons, most of them by scholars, and many of them by earnest men), that I now solemnly state I never heard *one* preacher deal faithfully with the quarrel between God and Mammon, or explain the need of choice between the service of those two masters. And all vices are indeed summed, and all their forces consummated, in that simple acceptance of the authority of gold instead of the authority of God; and preference of gain, or the increase of gold, to godliness, or the peace of God."<sup>2</sup>

But to Ruskin, Christian justice had become both dumb and blind: and modern Christianity appeared to consist of "knocking a man into a ditch, and then complacently telling him that since that is the position in which Providence has placed him, he should therefore remain content. Whereas whether there be one God or three,—no God, or ten thousand, every mother's heart in the world, if she has one, knows that children should have enough to eat, and that their skins should be washed clean. And whether there be saints in Heaven or not, every man on sea and shore who is not a rascal knows that as long as the stars shine on the sea and tunnies swim there, every fisherman who drags a net ashore is bound to say to as many human creatures as he can: 'Come and dine:' and the fishmongers who destroy their fish by cartloads that they may make the poor pay dear for what is left, ought to be flogged round Billingsgate, and out of it."<sup>3</sup>

In order to fulfil their task, the clergy, Ruskin maintained, should adopt a completely different attitude. "The assumption of the mediatorial, in defect of the pastoral, office by the clergy," he wrote in *The Lord's Prayer and the Church*, "fulfils itself, naturally and

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 25; *Works*, vol. 27, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 36; *Works*, vol. 27, p. 672.

<sup>3</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 88; *Works*, vol. 29, p. 383.

always, in their pretending to absolve the sinner from his punishment, instead of purging him from sin; and practically, in their general patronage and encouragement of all the iniquities of the world, by steadily preaching away the penalties of it."<sup>1</sup> "Let Bishops determine," he wrote elsewhere, "as distinctly what covetousness and extortion are in the rich, as what drunkenness is in the poor. Let them refuse, themselves, and order their clergy to refuse, to go out and dine with such persons; and still more positively to allow such persons to sup at God's table."<sup>2</sup> Albeit Ruskin engaged in many lengthy correspondences with clerical friends; he always found such efforts fruitless, since they invariably tried, not to ascertain the facts of contemporary abuses, but merely to defend practices which they held to be convenient in the world, and were afraid to blame in their congregations.

The most insidious and disastrous doctrine of all, in contemporary dogmatic Christianity, he maintained, was the idea of justification by faith, which enabled the most devout of evangelists to declaim from their pulpits that there were no thieves, nor devourers of widows' houses, nor any other manner of sinners in their congregations, who might not leave their churches entirely pardoned and respectable persons, if they would only believe the truths about to be communicated to them. "I neither know nor care," wrote Ruskin in *The Bible of Amiens*, "at what time the notion of justification by Faith, in the modern sense, first got itself distinctly fixed in the minds of the heretical sects and schools of the North. Practically its strength was founded by its first authors on an asceticism which differed from monastic rule in being only able to destroy, never to build; and in endeavouring to force what severity it thought proper for itself on everybody else also; and so striving to make one artless, letterless and merciless monastery of all the world. Its virulent effort broke down amidst furies of reactionary dissoluteness and disbelief, and remains now the basest of popular solders for every condition of broken law and bruised conscience which interest can provoke, or hypocrisy disguise. Thus the clergy are faced with the hopeless difficulties of trying to teach people to love their enemies, when their whole energies are devoted to swindling their friends, and vainly trying, if any effort is so made, to keep their flock from supposing that God's forgiveness is simply to be had for the asking by those who 'wilfully sin after they have received the knowledge of the truth'."<sup>3</sup>

But Ruskin, like Tolstoy, was not slow to discover, too, that many orthodox Christian precepts were simply distorted by mistranslation; that in the collect, for example, the word "us" has been conveniently slipped in before "thy servants", thus including "the squire and his

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, pp. 204-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 49; *Works*, vol. 28, pp. 252-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 172.

jockey, and the public house landlord—and anyone else who may chance to have been coaxed, swept or threatened into church on Trinity Sunday”;<sup>1</sup> and that the “English Liturgy was evidently drawn up with the amiable intention of making religion as pleasant as possible to a people desirous of saving their souls with no great personal inconvenience”.<sup>2</sup>

This degeneration of modern Christianity Ruskin attributed to the Reformation, which proclaimed that existing Christianity was a lie, but substituted no theory of it which could be more rationally or credibly sustained, with the result that ever since, the religion of educated persons throughout Europe had been dishonest or ineffectual; and it was only among the labouring peasantry that the grace of a pure Catholicism, and the patient simplicities of the Puritan, maintained their imaginative dignity, or supported their practical use. And since modern Protestantism sees in the cross “not a furca to which it is to be nailed, but a raft on which it, and all its valuable properties, are to be floated into Paradise”,<sup>3</sup> the chief obligations of religion have been completely ignored.

Ruskin’s own creed, which was essentially part of his being; which conditioned all his activities and informed all his works, was a profound belief in a creating Spirit as the source of all beauty, and a governing Spirit as the founder and maintainer of all moral law. “You may cease to believe two articles of the creed, and, admitting Christianity to be true,—still be forgiven. But I can tell you—you must not cease to believe the third! You begin by saying that you believe in an Almighty Father. Well, you may entirely lose the sense of that Fatherhood, and be forgiven. You go on to say that you believe in a Saviour Son. You may entirely lose the sense of that Sonship, and yet be forgiven. But the third article—disbelieve if you dare. ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life.’ Disbelieve that, and your own being is degraded into the state of dust driven by the wind; and the elements of dissolution have entered your very heart and soul. All Nature, with one voice—with one glory—is set to teach you the reverence for life communicated to you from the Father of Spirits.”<sup>4</sup> Practically, his great principle was: “Let us labour joyfully while we have the light. The night cometh,—but thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow.”<sup>5</sup> and always, the great guiding force of his life was the Bible, which, even when he had long since ceased to regard it as the literal transcription of the word of God, held for him in its pages, “mingled with mysteries we are not required to unravel, and difficulties which we should be insolent in trying to solve, a plain teaching for men of every rank of

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> *The Eagle's Nest: Works*, vol. 22, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 249.

soul and state in life, which, if they honestly and implicitly obey, will bring an innocent happiness, and victory over all adversities of temptation and pain".<sup>1</sup>

Towards the middle of the 'seventies, although his diatribes against the modern clergy persisted, *Fors Clavigera* began to take on a more religious strain.

"I must try to make my daily life more perfect as I grow old,"<sup>2</sup> he had noted in his diary in February 1873; but it was during the following summer, while living at Assisi in the home of the great saint, and there studying his life and teaching, that, seized with a strange mood of spiritual exaltation, he dreamed that he had been received as a brother of the third order of St. Francis. At the same time, while studying the Giotto frescoes, he discovered that the fallacy which had tormented him for sixteen years, his belief that religious artists were weaker than irreligious ones, was based simply on the fact that he had not realised that the limitations of the Christian primitives were due solely to lack of natural science: a fact which led him henceforward to a new and deeper appreciation of Christian art. But it was the steadily rising influence of nineteenth century materialism and atheism that compelled him to cry out once more, like a prophet of old, in defence of the Living God. The beautiful, elaborate and impressive ritual of the Roman Church still had a fascination for him. "I verily believe that, were I a Christian at all, Rome would make a Romanist of me in a fortnight,"<sup>3</sup> he wrote to Mrs. Severn from the Eternal City in 1874. Coventry Patmore, who stayed at Brantwood about this time, wrote to a friend: "He is very fond of talking about the Catholic religion, and says he thinks it likely he shall become a Catholic some day—but I think it is attractive to him only from the idea of pleasant intellectual repose which it presents to him. The arguments for its truth strike him just for the moment, but leave no impression, as far as I can see."<sup>4</sup> There were others, too, who noticed the re-orientation of his attitude, and Cardinal Manning, beguiling him with brilliant conversation and the most simply sumptuous of well cooked and archi-episcopal meals, hoped, too, that at last he would permit himself to be accepted into the Roman community. Indeed, so many rumours that he was about to become converted were bruited about, that presently Ruskin felt it incumbent upon him not only to dispel them, but also, in *Fors Clavigera*, to make a public confession of his faith. "Don't be afraid that I am going to become a Roman Catholic, or that I am one, in disguise. I can no more become a *Roman-Catholic*, than again an Evangelical-Protestant. I am a 'Catholic' of those Catholics, to whom the Catholic Epistle of St. James is addressed—the Twelve

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary*, 8.2.1873: *Works*, vol. 23, p. xx.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 5.5.1874: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Champneys, *Memoirs of Coventry Patmore*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 285.

Tribes which are scattered abroad'—the literally or spiritually wandering Israel of all the Earth. The St. George's creed includes Turks, Jews, infidels, and heretics; and I am myself much of a Turk, more of a Jew; alas, most of all,—an infidel; but not an atom of a heretic; Catholic, I, of the Catholics; holding only for sure God's order to His scattered Israel,—'He hath shown thee, oh man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' ”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Ruskin was more emotional in his religious beliefs than his words might here suggest: and in 1882, when he was visiting La Fontaine, the birthplace of St. Bernard, a bystander was surprised to see him go down on his knees at the spot of the saint's birth, and remain for a long while deep in prayer. But throughout, his bias was always to the righteously active, rather than the obediently contemplative life. He loved the Cathedral of Amiens, and valued it above all other religious architecture, because "what His life is, what His commands *are*, and what his judgment *will be*, are the things here taught; not what He once did, not what He once suffered, but what He is now doing—and what He requires us to do. That is the pure, joyful, beautiful lesson of Christianity; and the fall from that faith, and all the corruptions of its abortive practice, may be summed briefly as the habitual contemplation of Christ's death instead of His life, and the substituting of His past suffering for our present duty." <sup>2</sup>

Sometimes he believed that what appeared to be the failure of his own efforts was largely due to a compromise with the infidelity of the outer world, and his attempt to base all his pleading upon motives of ordinary prudence and humanity, rather than upon the one essential and primary duty of loving God. Nevertheless, his teaching had never been other than a deliberate application of Christian ethics to practical affairs; and had never led in any direction other than that of more comprehensive understanding. As he wrote in *The Bible of Amiens*: "How far my mind has been paralysed by the faults and sorrows of life,—how far short its knowledge may be of what I might have known, had I more faithfully walked in the light I had, is beyond my conjecture or confession: but as I never wrote for my own pleasure of self-proclaiming, I have been guarded, as men who so write always will be, from errors dangerous to others; and the fragmentary expression of feeling or statements of doctrine, which from time to time I have been able to give, will be found now by an attentive reader to bind themselves together into a general system of interpretation of sacred literature,—both classic and Christian, which will enable him without injustice to sympathise in the faiths of candid and generous souls, of every age and every clime." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 76; *Works*, vol. 29, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 33, p. 119.

Indeed, the longer he lived, the more Catholic "in the true and eternal sense of the word" he became, and although, in private conversation, he would sometimes admit to his friends that, if in ethics a Christian, like all true men, nevertheless he could not but believe that, for man, death was the end, his precept and practice was always towards a deliberately religious life. One of his last letters to the press, written to the *Standard* in 1899, was in explanation of the breadth of his own creed and communion. "I gladly take the bread, water, wine or meat of the Lord's Supper with members of my own family or Nation who obey Him," he declared, "and should be equally sure it was His giving, if I were myself worthy to receive it, whether the intermediate mortal hand were the Pope's, the Queen's, or a hedgeside gipsy."<sup>1</sup> But Ruskin's real communion, throughout his life, was the communion of the artist and poet: his *panis substantialis* those rare moments of fully awakened consciousness when the mind is detached and deliberately at rest; when the usual egotism of being is deliberately suppressed, and the emotional faculties, cleansed of all human desire and sorrow, respond in serenity and joy to the mystery and beauty of the external world.

## 3

It was after his second attack of brain fever that Ruskin was reconciled with Mrs. La Touche, and she paid a visit to him at Brantwood.

"I am fairly well again except that I have lost much animal spirits, and am entirely forbidden some directions of thought—by all prudence—however sometimes compelled into them by Fate, kind, or unkind, or both," he wrote to Lady Mount Temple at the beginning of August 1881. "The last illness was not so terrific as the first, though quite as sad in the close, and more of a warning, since it showed the malady to be recurrent if I put myself into certain lines of thought. The visionary part of it was half fulfilled—as soon as I was well enough to make it safe for me, by Lacerta's coming to see me and finding some manner of comfort (not to me comprehensible—but I was glad to see it) in being with Joannie and me. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

After this, Mrs. La Touche came to stay at Coniston several times, and Ruskin and Mrs. La Touche corresponded freely. ". . . Indeed and in truth, there is *no* one who can help me as you can, for you see with my eyes and more—and feel as I feel—perhaps in some directions only the least bit less—and speak more clearly than any living animal can speak or sing, except an Irishwoman,"<sup>3</sup> Ruskin told her on 9 June, 1883, when the old bitterness was completely purged from

<sup>1</sup> *Arrows of the Chace*; Letter in *Standard* of 28.5.1889; *Works*, vol. 34, p. 618.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished letter of 2.8.1881, from Brantwood; original with Mrs. Detmar Blow.

<sup>3</sup> Young, *Letters of a Noble Woman*, op. cit., pp. 117-18.

him; and it was to her that, in June 1889, he wrote one of the last known letters in his own hand.

Mrs. La Touche, during these years, was also reconciled to George MacDonald, whom she met again at Bordighera; but nothing could give back the years which the locusts had eaten; and though they continued friends, the shadow of a beautiful dead girl always lay between them. This shadow Ruskin, too, had felt lay between George MacDonald and himself; and the two men had seen practically nothing of each other since Rose's death. To George MacDonald, less expansive but more ardent in friendship than Ruskin, this had been a deep grief. He had fancied that Ruskin no longer cared for him: and it had saddened him that he had been able to give up his friendship evidently without a pang. But in 1884 he sent to his old friend one of his new lectures and, although the two men never met again, at least they too were reconciled in spirit.

"You are the first person to whom I write to-day," Ruskin replied to him on 8 February—"I am so very happy to hear from you, having fancied you were partly estranged from me. I was rudely unkind to you once at Broadlands—also I thought you might feel there was a sort of Shadow of Death upon me, since 1872-5, and did not like to enter it—again. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And two years later, before the darkness closed in upon him, Ruskin was once more criticising MacDonald's work for him just as he had done twenty and more years before.

When Ruskin had recovered from his first lapse into unreality of 1878, his attitude to Rose had undergone a profound change. No longer was she a ministering angel, or an incarnate saint who sent him bewildering, symbolic messages, but once more simply a lovely and charming girl whom he had loved and lost. Nevertheless, she still haunted the corridors of his memory, and until the end his letters were full of references to her.

"It's very pretty of you to give me those lovely lines," he wrote to Mary Gladstone, who had sent him Paracelsus' *On April*, on 1 February, 1879. "I like them because that child I told you of, who died, who wasn't usually by way of paying me compliments, did once say, 'Those eyes', after looking at them awhile. If they could but see ever so little a way towards her, now! Tomorrow, Lady Day, it will be thirteen years since she bade me 'wait' three, and I'm tired of waiting."<sup>2</sup>

But there were times when he found the idea even of a possible reunion hereafter of very poor comfort. "You," he wrote to his old friend and neighbour, Miss Susan Beever, "expect to see your Margaret in heaven. I wanted my Rosie *here*. In heaven I mean to go and talk to Pythagoras and Socrates and Valerius Publicola. I shan't care a bit for Rosie there, and she needn't think it. What will

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of 8.2.1884, from Brantwood; original with Mr. G. Leon.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 1.2.1879: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 273.

grey eyes and red cheeks be good for there? . . ."<sup>1</sup> Yet the death of all hope brought him, sometimes, a strange, apathetic serenity. "The taking away from me of all feverish hope, and the ceasing of all feverish effort, leaves me to enjoy, at least without grave drawback or disturbance, the Veronica blue, instead of the Forget-me-not, and above all, the investigation of any pretty natural problem, the ways of a wave, or the length of a stem," he wrote to Dr. John Brown. "With the persons whom I most loved, joy in the *beauty* of nature is virtually dead in me, but I can still interest myself in her doings."<sup>2</sup>

And to Coventry Patmore he wrote on 20 April, 1880:

"I have been putting chords of music lately, such as I can, to Herrick's *Comfort*:

'In endless bliss  
She thinks not on  
What's said or done  
In earth (the original word in this line is mirth).

'Nor doth she mind  
Or think on't now  
That ever thou  
Wast kind—feeling only that it is too true.'<sup>3</sup>

The following year, however, the old obsession had conquered him again, and he had even got his own evening thoughts, as he told C. E. Norton, "into a steady try if I couldn't get Rosie's ghost at least alive by me, if not the body of her. . . ."<sup>4</sup> And in 1884 he was gravely assuring Kate Greenaway that his dead Rose was a saint in her way, with the constant habit of prayer.

Yet he never ceased to re-read all her old letters to him, still seeking answers to the many enigmas they presented—still torturing himself as to whether, had he acted, instead of the way he had, in this manner or in that, she would have been happier—or at least less tortured by the tragic circumstances of her life.

To Francesca, in his last years, he poured out the whole sad story and gave her a photograph of Rose, which always hung in her room; while she, in her great sympathy and understanding, did her utmost to give ease and consolation to his troubled spirit.

When she had sent him one of her moving stories—it was Mrs. La Touche, then staying at Coniston, who had read it to him, in a quiet, steady voice, until the end—"You don't know how strange it was that Rose's mother read that letter," he wrote her on 23 August, 1884. "I never told you that it was chiefly the mother that separated us, and I have been in such bitterness of soul against her as you in your goodness never could so much as conceive. Two years ago, she wrote

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 25.6.1874: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Dr. John Brown*, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> Champneys, *Memoirs of Coventry Patmore*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 26.4.1881: *Works*, vol. 37, p. 355.



to Joan asking if I would forgive her. But I *had* forgiven her, though she did not know it, on Christmas day of 1876 at Venice.

"And *she* is happy, though how, I cannot conceive, in being here, and when she read that letter I showed her other things about Rose, which seemed to be good for her. But—if only I could tell you the whole story, as *you* could have told it to me!"<sup>1</sup>

"I'm afraid you were chilled and frightened when Mrs. La Touche came," Ruskin wrote to Mrs. Alexander at the end of the year; "but you must put that idea out of your mind. There is nothing now between us but the entirest peace, and I am only too glad if I can make her the least happy, as I know Rose is too. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In the weeks that followed, Rose haunted him anew with an even greater power than before; and his letters to Francesca were full of hesitations and misgivings.

"I never understood until lately that you blamed yourself on her account," Francesca wrote to him on 7 May, 1885. "It took me a great while to understand it, because I never heard of people thinking there was anything wrong in loving each other, and it does seem to me the strangest idea. . . . If you think you did wrong, what do you suppose would have been right? That you should not have cared for each other? But do you suppose that either of you could have helped it? *Al cuore non si commanda*. That is a good text out of Edwige's gospel. Do you think you ought to have concealed your attachment to her? . . . I believe that *your* affection was a gift of Heaven to *her*, and you had no right to keep away from her what the Lord had given her. You do not think *you* gave it to her, do you? Do you think you could give it to anyone you choose? If the mother chose to turn your good into evil, you had no more responsibility about it than if you had given her a glass of pure spring water, and the mother had put poison in it. But supposing you *had* concealed your feelings, and she had died all the same. Would you not then blame yourself on the other hand, and say 'I might have saved her'? Or supposing (what is not very likely) that the mother had married her to a husband of her own choosing—would you not rather have her in Heaven than suffering what one like her *must* have suffered in that moral starvation and imprisonment of the heart, a marriage of convenience? If you would not, it must be because you have not seen as much as I have of such marriages, which are the curse and ruin of my beautiful Italy. And as for the parents trusting you—there, I may as well confess it; I lost my patience a little, when you brought forward such a reason as that against yourself.

"Do you think it would have been better for her to have loved someone whom they did not trust, or had a bad opinion of?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin's *Letters to Francesca*, op. cit., pp. 77-8.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

But Ruskin's bewildered mind, too long weighed down beneath the double burden of bitterness and remorse, was not so simply to be eased: and diffidently he sent Francesca one of Rose's most beautiful and precious letters to him and some of her poems, to see if she could solve the enigma that still dissipated all peace of mind.

"She was herself when she wrote that; it is lovelier than anything I have seen of hers yet. How can I ever thank you for trusting me with such treasures?"<sup>1</sup> Francesca wrote him on 13 March, 1886; and the following day: "Mio caro Fratello, . . . Your letter and poor Rosie's have been in my mind ever since I received them yesterday: I keep turning over your words and hers, and they give me much new light on things which I am only just beginning to understand. I think she tried to prevent your loving her, as she thought too much, because she recognized her own condition, and probably felt that whoever loved her would have to suffer with her and for her. She does not seem to have understood that you would have found your greatest happiness in making her happy, as far as she could be made so, during the little time she had to stay here. I wish, for her sake and yours, that things had been different, and that you could have a few happy years to look back upon. But do remember, that not your love, nor any earthly love, could have lengthened the time; in any case, things would have been now . . . just where they are. There is no use in trying to keep with us those who are not of this world; one might as well try to keep a rainbow. I do not think you 'bothered' her, and it would have been well if she had not been afraid to trust you—and herself. She speaks as if your goodness to her were a great comfort, but she seems to have suffered from the unkindness of her family, and she longed to go—and after all, you could not have made her half so happy as the Lord made her when He took her home! I still think that her illness had begun to work on the mind, so that she was not herself always (I can in no other way account for her being, as she seems to have been, at different times, two different people—*this* letter has nothing in common with the two you sent me before, excepting the handwriting), and I never read anything more heart-breaking than the words in which she speaks of her own condition. I think I know my *Sorella* better, since I have read this letter, and she is brought nearer to me than ever before. But, *Fratello*, the trouble is over for her a great while ago. Do try, by the Lord's help, to let it be so, as far as possible, for you. . . . If she could have been all yours—as the Lord knows I wish with all my heart she might have been—you would have had some beautiful memories in your life now, but you would not have had much else. You say yourself that you would have sacrificed *everything* for her; and when she was taken, you would have found that all your life had gone with her. But there

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

is no use talking; one must fall back on Ida's saying: '*He knows what He does!*' There is no great comfort outside of these words.

"I have no heart to write about anything else to-day; but I must tell you how very much I felt your kindness in putting *my* letter with *hers*—indeed, I felt it too much to say more about it. . . . Please do not forget, when you write again, to tell us about that beautiful poetry which we have been wondering and conjecturing over, ever since it came. *Mamma* thinks it must be by some *old* poet. And I think it is too good and too powerful to be modern. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

"Darling Sorel," Ruskin had written the previous day, "It's lovely your taking Rosie's poetry for an old master's. I find the wicked little witch sent it to Joan—as if it was merely addressed to the Spaces and Eternities—and Joan copied it for me.

"Remember, however, I've been sending you her letters at five-and-twenty. I'll copy you a rhyme at eighteen when I've time. . . ."<sup>2</sup> And the following day he told her how he, alone, had sometimes been able to soothe her attacks of madness.

"Mio caro Fratello," Francesca continued on 20 March, ". . . I was almost afraid to write you what I did about my poor Sorella; but now I see that I was right, that the words that seemed so unlike her were not really *hers* but only fancies of her illness, for which she was no more responsible than for her dreams. I am thankful for you that you have at least this to remember, that you were able to give her relief when no one else could, and at the time when she suffered most: I should think that remembrance, sad as it is, would always be a comfort and blessing in your life. But I cannot tell you how it went to my heart that she should have been comforted by *our* hymn (as Sylvia calls it), the one which I wrote you about from Bezzonico, and which I am always singing to myself when I am alone; and it will now be dearer to me than ever. I think, *Fratello*, with all your sorrow and loneliness, which this departure put into your life, that you must sometimes find it in your heart to give thanks for *her*, safe now with the Friend who she loved so dearly that His name was sufficient to give her peace, even in delirium! . . .

"I was astonished to hear that the poetry was hers; we had both supposed it by some old poet, probably one of the greatest, *Mamma* suggested Milton, but I told her that if it had been by him we should certainly have seen it before. I am glad that I read it without suspecting that she wrote it, as otherwise the love that has grown up in my heart for that dear saintly Rosie (and which increased with all that I know about her) would have made me distrust my own admiration of it. She must have been a wonderful woman! But I am going to try this time not to fill my letter with what after all it must sadden you to dwell on (though I should like to go on writing about her to

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 113–116.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 117.

the end of my four pages), and there is much else that I must say to-day. . . . The early poetry which you promise to send me from Rosie will be a great treasure: I can understand why she did not send it to you directly; she thought that she could conceal to whom it was addressed; and while she loved *you*, it seems to me that at times she avoided anything that might bind *you* to *her*. . . . Probably she had a presentiment of that shadow that hung over her and whoever loved her. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Over three years later, in May 1889, when Ruskin was still torturing himself with doubts, Francesca wrote again: "You must not ask me to think of you as 'answerable for Rosie's death' when I know that you would have saved her if you could: if any were to blame they were those who parted her from you; and I do not blame even them as I did once, for believe me, *Fratello*, that I do not say it to comfort you but because I feel sure it is true. She would never have lived long! The beautiful face that hangs before me in the little silver frame between Ida and my crucifix was never made for this world. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

## 4

Late in that summer of 1889, the terrible and tragic nescience once more descended upon him; and though after nearly a year he was able to leave his room once more, Ruskin never composed and, save to very intimate friends, hardly ever wrote again.

That pen, so keenly valiant in attack, so nobly eloquent in praise, so swift in understanding and compassion, was henceforward silent for ever; and when he was asked, a few months later, for his signature, he could not even complete the initial letters that his trembling fingers had begun. In 1893, he forced himself to write a few lines to his aged friend Susan Beever on her death bed; but even this note of but eight lines taxed the exhausted hand and bewildered brain for over three hours. And when, on the death of Gladstone in 1898, he wished to write a letter of condolence to his daughter, he accomplished—"Dear Mary, I am grieved at the death of your father—" <sup>3</sup> and then no more. For many years Mrs. Severn had written all his letters for him.

Nevertheless, until the middle of the 'nineties, apart from those periods in which he was aware of his own delirium, no matter how fretful and fevered he may have been, Ruskin was usually able to discriminate clearly. The fact that many of his earlier ideas had been often hailed as insane had no connection with these later attacks of cerebral disease, but was simply the usual vulgar reaction to ideas

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 119-122.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> E. T. Cook, *Life of Ruskin*, vol. 2, p. 532.

which ran contrary to the general trend. William Rossetti, who knew Ruskin well over a long period, was later emphatic upon this point. "He always presented the aspect of a man of very sensitive mind," he wrote, "somewhat strained and overstrained, and a little liable to take a contrary or perverse bias—in the sense that, when there was every fair presumption and anticipation that he would be well pleased and affirmative, he turned out to be punctilious and negative."<sup>1</sup> But from first to last he never showed any symptom of impaired reason.

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 184.

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## Chapter IX

1. *Effects of his influence: the appreciation of Morris and Tolstoy: eightieth birthday presentations: the slow decline: death.* 2. *Burial: the sorrow of Octavia Hill: of Proust: Tolstoy's praise.*

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I  
NEVERTHELESS, while Ruskin lived out the last years of his life tragically bereft of his courageous energies and his noble eloquence, his life was exerting an ever stronger influence upon practical affairs. The prophet was silent: but his words lived, and his name became more and more commonly associated with social amelioration and educational reform. A Board school near Denmark Hill, a College for Working Men at Oxford, a Hall at Birkenhead, these, and other institutions like them, now bore the name of the man after whom there had already been christened a Drawing School and a Museum of his own creation. His books, printed now in cheaper editions, had won an enormous public, translations were appearing in many European languages, and many academic honours were bestowed upon him.

More important, many of the most powerful and noble contemporary minds were directly influenced by his works no less than by his personality, and were generously conscious of their indebtedness. Gandhi admitted that his life had been changed by reading *Unto this Last*; and such distinguished men as Coomaraswamy and Berdyaev had learned English chiefly in order to be able to read his works. William Morris, indeed—"beaten gold—the ablest man of his time," as Ruskin called him—used to say that without Ruskin, art in nineteenth-century England would have been impossible. And in May 1876, at the time of the atrocities in Bulgaria through Turkish misrule, Ruskin had willingly supported him on the Eastern Question Association. ". . . The summer has been made really nightmarish to me by thinking over these doleful miseries," Morris had written to a friend—"and it seems a shame to be comfortable and a shame to be happy," and, together with Burne-Jones, had gone with a crowd to Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square to protest. "All your letter is very precious to me," Ruskin had written to Burne-Jones when his aid was sought. "I am greatly amazed for one thing, to find I can be of any use and value to you in this matter—supposing myself a mere outlaw in public opinion. I hope neither Morris nor you will retire wholly again out of such spheres of effort. It seems to me especially a time when the quietest men should be disquieted, and the meekest self-

asserting.”<sup>1</sup> And just as, the following year, when William Morris was propagating the ideas of his Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, which, two years later, was agitating, in sympathy with Ruskin, against the threatened destruction of the west front of St. Mark’s through restoration, he had written: “My dear Ruskin, We all think it might do good to distribute a leaflet with a reprint of your words on restoration in the *Seven Lamps*. Will you allow us to do so? They are so good, and so completely settle the whole matter, that I feel ashamed at having to say anything else about it, as if the idea was an original one of mine, or anybody’s else but yours: but I suppose it is of service, or maybe, for different people to say the same thing. . . .

“I needn’t say I don’t feel in very high spirits as to the amount of good our Society is like to do; especially since so little is left to save, yet it might be of use for the future if we could make people ashamed of the damage they have done; and at the worst one must say that we are driven to speak at last—” In later years, Tolstoy admitted that he had read everything of Ruskin’s, from *Unto this Last* onwards. “When Ruskin began to write on philosophy and on morality,” he once said to an English visitor, “he was ignored by everybody, especially by the English press, which has a peculiar way of ignoring anybody it does not like. I am not astonished that people speak so little of Ruskin in comparison with Gladstone. When the latter makes a speech, the papers are loud in their praises, but when Ruskin, whom I believe to be a greater man, talks, they say nothing.” “He was a very great man,” he said on another occasion. “I like his face. I have seen two portraits, front face and profile, both after he had grown a beard. He was like a Russian peasant.” This was the occasion upon which the visitor explained how Ruskin had once lamented to him that he had not renounced all his possessions. “That interests me very much,” Tolstoy said, “for it is my case also. And why did not Ruskin do it?” “He found it so difficult. He had so many ties, artists to support, and so on.” “Ah,” Tolstoy replied with a sigh, “That is it; we do not become Christians until late in life, and then there are ties.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while his message continued to inseminate some of the finest of contemporary minds, Ruskin, venerable, remote, withdrawn and patriarchally bearded, sat at the window of his bedroom, gazing out upon the view of the Coniston Old Man, or listening, with gentle, vague and unseeing eyes, while the daughters of his old friends read to him—often wondering, as they did so, whether he understood their words. Out in the world, his prophetic role was rapidly becoming a Victorian legend; and his eightieth birthday, in 1899, was celebrated with a solemn pomp.

Deputations arrived at Brantwood bearing congratulations and an

<sup>1</sup> B. Burne-Jones, *Memorials of E. Burne-Jones*, vol. 2, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Tolstoy in *Daily Chronicle*, 4.8.1903.

illuminated address on vellum from the combined innumerable Ruskin and kindred societies that had recently sprung up, signed by the Prince of Wales and the official dignitaries of many of the most learned and distinguished literary artists and scientific bodies in England.

"Year by year," declared this imposing document, "there is, in ever widening extent, an increasing trust in your ethical, social and art teaching, an increasing desire to realise the noble ideals you have set before mankind, in words which we feel have brought nearer to our hearts the kingdom of God upon Earth. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And they added that it would be a great happiness to them if, on behalf of the many national institutions that wished to be allowed the opportunity of being included in this general expression of their deepest respect, profoundest admiration, and sincerest affection, he would consent to his portrait being painted by his life-long friend, William Holman Hunt, and accept the same as the national property of the St. George's Guild—a prospect that his present state of health unfortunately made quite impossible.

Scarcely less impressive was the message sent him by the Vice-Chancellor and Heads of Houses in the University of Oxford, to assure him that "in Oxford the gratitude and reverence with which men think of you is ever fresh".<sup>2</sup> Even the Coniston Parish Council sent a deputation of its own: while the press was filled with columns of congratulation, and telegrams, flowers and other gifts arrived in enormous numbers from friends and sympathisers all over the world.

But now it was all too late. "I am tired of fighting, as I have done all my life, against the fury of modern avarice and injustice, and now I can fight no more," he had written ten years before: and the benign and venerable figure that to-day accepted so many congratulations could scarcely have been aware of their significance.

Nevertheless, he did not appear to visitors to be unhappy, and Hall Caine, who visited him shortly before, has left a very vivid picture of him in these last years. "I found him very old and bent and feeble, a smaller, frailer man than I looked for, well in health both of body and mind, but with faculties that were dying down very slowly and gently, and almost imperceptibly—as the lamp dies down when the oil fails in it . . . his eyes were slow and peaceful, having lost their former fire; and his face, from which the quiet life of later years had smoothed away the lines of strong thought and torturing experience, was too much hidden by a full grey beard. He spoke very little, and always in a soft and gentle voice that might have been the voice of a woman; but he listened to everybody and smiled frequently. All the fiery heat of earlier days was gone, all the nervous force of the fever patient, all the capacity for noble anger and righteous wrath. Nothing

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. 34, p. 734.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 735.



was left but gentleness, sweetness, and quiet courtesy, the unruffled peace of a breathless evening that is gliding into a silent night. . . . His whole personality left the impression of the approach of death, but of death so slow, so gradual, so tender and so beautiful, that it almost made one in love with it to see it robbed of every terror."<sup>1</sup>

This mildness was remarked upon by other visitors: even reaching the point when, upon looking out of the window, a guest noticed puffs of white smoke above the lake, and noticing its cause, inadvertently remarked that the railway did little harm there, he received the unexpected and mild reply: "No, it does no harm".

Sydney Cockerell, who visited him for the last time, after an interval of nearly eight years, found him in his bedroom sitting with a little book before him, his hands encased in fur mittens. "I cannot be sure that he recognized me," he wrote later, "though when I said that I had been to Beauvais nine times since we were there together, he answered, 'And I have not been there once'. Did he remember Detmar? 'No!' Did he remember Rooke? 'No!' To other questions, 'Yes' or 'No', never a longer sentence except the one just given. He looked tranquil, rather wistful, shrunken, but very little changed in face since I saw him last in 1892—his hair still dark and very thick, his beard still with a trace of brown. It was like interviewing a ghost, but very wonderful—and as I was prepared to see something less like what I remembered I was not cast down."<sup>2</sup>

Slowly, inevitably, the springs of life were running dry. Nearly all his old friends and contemporaries were already dead. Rossetti, Millais and Morris had gone, and in 1898 Burne-Jones followed them. "That's my dear brother Ned,"<sup>3</sup> the aged Ruskin had said, the night before, in prophetic recognition, as he had passed his portrait going up to bed. Even his beloved Turners at last had lost their radiance, the "best in this sort" being now but shadows.

The end came on 20 January, 1900, after he had been ill with influenza for two days. Although the evening before he had been able to dine, in the morning his condition had become so critical he could not eat. Eventually he sank into a coma, and, in peaceful oblivion, holding his beloved cousin's, Mrs. Severn's, hand, he passed unconsciously into death.

## 2

The press was filled with eulogious obituaries: a grave was offered in the Abbey, where later, instead, a memorial was erected. But Ruskin was buried, as he had wished to be, in the quiet churchyard at Coniston. For him who hated funereal black, a pall of crimson silk

<sup>1</sup> Hall Caine, *Recollections of Rossetti*, pp. 87-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Friends of a Lifetime*, op. cit., pp. 60-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. 35, p. xliii.

embroidered with the phrase *Unto this Last* on a grey field surrounded by wild roses was given by the Ruskin Linen Industry of Keswick; and his grave was heaped high with wreaths from royal princesses, from famous artists, from the humble tradesmen who lived nearby. Watts had sent one of olive from the sacred tree that had been cut previously only for Tennyson, Leighton and Burne-Jones.

"The earth seems indeed a sadder place that such a man lives in it no more," Octavia Hill wrote after his death in her letter to her fellow workers. "That penetrating sympathy, that marvellous imagination, that wonderful power of expression, that high ideal of life have not only blessed his friends but have left their mark on England. To me personally the loss is irreparable. . . ."

"When I heard of the death of Ruskin, it was you more than anyone else that I wished to tell of my sorrow," Proust wrote to Mary Nordlinger, who was later to help him with such devotion with his Ruskin translations. "But it is a healthy sorrow and one full of consolation; for when I see how mightily this dead man lives, how much more truly I admire him, listen to him, strive to understand and to obey him than I do many living men. I know how slight a thing death is—"

"Ruskin was one of the most remarkable men, not only of England and our time, but of all countries and all times," wrote Tolstoy, his greatest contemporary and disciple. "He was one of those rare men who think with their hearts (*les grandes pensées viennent du cœur*), and so he thought and said not only what he himself had seen and felt, but what everyone will think and say in future."



## CHIEF SOURCES OF MATERIAL

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3. Letters of Ruskin, Rose La Touche, Mrs. La Touche, etc., to Mr. and Mrs. George MacDonald. In the possession of the author. (Some of these letters have been previously published in Dr. Greville MacDonald's *Reminiscences of a Specialist*.)
4. Letters of Ruskin and of John Everett Millais to Holman Hunt. In the possession of Mrs. Michael Joseph.

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